

WATER IN MEDIEVAL  
INTELLECTUAL CULTURE

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## CURSOR MUNDI

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WATER IN MEDIEVAL  
INTELLECTUAL CULTURE

Case-Studies from Twelfth-Century  
Monasticism

by

James L. Smith



BREPOLS

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I have sent a cup full of mixed drink to be examined by the judgment of your learning; whether it is to stand or fall is in your hands. It contains a twofold mixture, namely, a variety of subject matter and skill.

If during the drinking something tasteless to a delicate palate, or something bitter occurs, it is not because of the nature of the components, but rather the lack of skill of the artisan.

If you should decide [...] that the whole drink is to be kept, this will be an argument of great value to me, even if I find it in the spices of your correction.

~A letter from Godfrey of Saint-Victor to Stephen of Tournai —  
the prologue of the *Fons Philosophiae*

*From the source,  
In memory of Philippa Maddern  
Vale*

*To wherever the river flows,  
To Debs  
My inspiration*



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James L. Smith  
York, UK, 2016

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## INTRODUCTION

In the thirteenth century, the Dominican grammarian John of Genoa compiled his *Summa Grammaticalis*, also known as the *Catholicon*.<sup>1</sup> The treatise sketches out a lengthy rhetorical and mnemonic image of a river system in order to teach grammar. In discussing Priscian's description of the parts of speech, John proposed that the 'accidents' of a part of speech such as a noun (gender, number, case, etc.) were not part of the *species* or *primitive* category of grammar, but were derivatives (*derivativa*), or as we might understand them, subsets. He employed the use of figurative rhetorical techniques to argue that this structure is to be taken metaphorically (*transsumptive*):

For 'primitive' is taken from a spring [*fons*] where water coming through hidden channels first [*primus*] appears. 'Derivative' is taken from the stream [*rivus*] that flows forth [*de*] from the spring itself. Hence just as a stream can be deduced from another stream, so one derivative originates from another. But springs and streams [*rivi*] flow down to produce a river [*flumen*]. For all rivers come out of the sea, and finally return to the sea. And the sea does not overflow [*redundat*]. Similarly, all sentences [*orationes*] take their origin from grammar, and they return to the same, and yet grammar is not redundant [*redundat*].<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Catholicon* was so popular that it was still in use in the fifteenth century when it became one of the first printed *incunabula* (1460 in Mainz). Copeland and Sluiter have traced many of its concepts to classical grammarians such as Priscian. Joannes Balbus (John of Genoa), *Catholicon*, edited as 'Etymology Dossier', trans. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 360–61, pp. 360–61.

<sup>2</sup> Joannes Balbus (John of Genoa), *Catholicon*, edited as 'Etymology Dossier', trans. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 361. Please note that Latin is provided in this book for the purposes of textual analysis, but not in material cited as a contextual source.



The peculiarly aqueous nature of this simile might be taken at face value as a convenient device for explication, yet the roots of its efficacy go deep. The categorization of syntax and the poetry of water exist side by side in a mutually supportive fashion, forming a network of words in which each part is related to each other, to their ends, and to their origins through a flow of causality. The passage above reveals a core question: how does water function as an intellectual entity within medieval thought, and what affordances does it lend to the practices of intellection and imagination? And further, in the context of twelfth-century Western monasticism, what does the exercise of these affordances teach us about the inner lives and thought practices of monastics?

The *Catholicon* suggests that medieval metaphor is not rigid or inflexible, but dynamic. John of Genoa deploys metaphorical evocation not as a superfluous ornament, but as an important means of understanding the interconnectedness and dynamism of language, of a distinct way of thinking. Water continues to move within the imagination even when captured in static form upon the page, in image, or in words. For medieval thought, the painting of a picture within the mind rendered water as an ever-moving force, for the memory of its movement imbued it with all the force of true motion recreated within the spaces of the mind.<sup>3</sup> Its resonance with intellection and imagination forms a framework for meaning that is generative rather than reductive, causative rather than conventionally metaphorical. This process aids in the composition of mental images through rhetoric, which must be useful 'to a person, whether acting as author or as audience, during the procedure of thought', as Mary Carruthers has described it.<sup>4</sup> Thought in the process of composition requires movement, and thus even seemingly inactive imagery comes to life through the thought act. Karl F. Morrison and Giselle de Nie have argued that the imitation of nature led to static and artificial images presented 'like a snapshot, in mid-air' that 'fixed the attention on that one, isolated instant'.<sup>5</sup> This may be true at the point of phenomenal apprehension, and yet an image of nature was the fuel of thought, and not thought itself; motion occurred within the mind once the catalyst was provided. The fluid models that appear here move and interact, synthesize and conflict. The result is intellectual dynamism, and a unique combination of structural rigour and the fluidity of an enabling intellectual entity.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Carruthers has advanced this argument in 'Moving Images in the Mind's Eye', pp. 287–305.

<sup>4</sup> Carruthers, 'Moving Images in the Mind's Eye', p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> Morrison and de Nie, 'Introduction', pp. 10–11.

Within this book, I present a model for the power of water as an ingredient in the motion of composition, providing an image of medieval graphicacy, or ‘visual literacy’, that is composed in a lively and motive fashion, and not confined to the pale artificiality presented by Morrison and de Nie.<sup>6</sup> Derived from the work of W. G. V. Balchin and Alice M. Coleman in the 1960s, the notion of graphicacy expands literacy to discuss forms of interpretation that could not be accommodated by the written word.<sup>7</sup> As Ildar Garipzanov has argued in his treatment of graphicacy in the early Middle Ages and Late Antiquity, we must understand what we see in pre-modern source material ‘with reference to classical and medieval graphic compositions that were created and used with reliance on that particular cognitive skill and in response to historically limited cultural systems of representation’.<sup>8</sup> This book will explore some of the historically distinct medieval monastic philosophies that underpinned the use of complex water metaphor through the reading of diverse texts. Its readings will reveal some of the medieval ideas that allowed the generation of rhetorical expression from abstract water imagery. Just as John of Genoa maps out the familial relationships of grammar with an evocation of water’s integrity, fluidity and interconnectivity, so too can water represent the spread of ideas from place to place along the paths of the mind.

The book has several overarching goals. The first is to examine the link between medieval imaginations of water and practices of thought, particularly in high medieval Western monasticism. The second is to explore and explain the monastic rhetoric in which the properties of water were enlisted to express complex thought. The third is to use understandings drawn from these investigations to offer new readings of diverse texts generated by monastics and Augustinian canons of the twelfth century, bringing clarity to a specific facet of their thoughts. Finally, the overall aim is to provide new insights into the history of monastic thought and our understanding of water in the wider Middle Ages.

At the heart of these inquiries lies a series of significant questions. What do ideas of water in medieval thought teach us about the life-world of medieval

<sup>6</sup> Graphicacy is defined by Aldrich and Sheppard as ‘the ability to understand and present information in the form of sketches, photographs, diagrams, maps, plans, charts, graphs and other non-textual, two-dimensional formats’. In the case of medieval thought, an abstract form of graphicacy is at work. See Aldrich and Sheppard, “Graphicacy”: The Fourth “R”?, pp. 1–7. For a comprehensive treatment in the medieval context, see Garipzanov, ‘The Rise of Graphicacy’, pp. 1–21.

<sup>7</sup> Balchin and Coleman, ‘Graphicacy Should Be the Fourth Ace in the Pack’, pp. 23–28.

<sup>8</sup> Garipzanov, ‘The Rise of Graphicacy’, p. 3.

monastics?<sup>9</sup> How is this life-world expressed through the thought-world, the realm of ideas that we glimpse when reading medieval texts, viewing medieval images, or interpreting medieval discourse? If the materials of memory shaped the thought-world of medieval thinkers, then what is the influence of environment on the shaping of memory? What can we glimpse of a medieval structural context for thought through another, visible, environmental context? Although modern understandings of structure and form differ from those of the Middle Ages, we share a basic experience and understanding of the properties of water as a phenomenal entity.

The mind, as understood in the Middle Ages, was thought to shape images of environmental phenomena from the *sensus communis*, to give them form, and to place them in context within the structure of the mind. Mediated through the Aristotelian tradition and that of his commentators, the medieval theory of intellection thought images (*imagines*) to be gathered together (*colligere*) from raw sense data by the actions of phantasy (*fantasia*) and the power of making forms (the *vis formalis*).<sup>10</sup> Encountering such an entity was, in the words of Tim Ingold, ‘not a matter of affixing some meaning to the object — of recognizing it as one of a certain kind to which certain uses might be attached — but of discovering meaning in the very process of use’.<sup>11</sup> The literate medieval mind could then create models through the remediated powers of word and image, impressing this schema upon further minds through recursive use. It could draw on what James J. Gibson has termed ‘affordances’, traits that encourage a form of use over other forms. A chair, for example, has the affordance of seating a human being, despite having many other potential uses.

Entities with affordances are possessed of a quality that is ‘neither an objective property nor a subjective property [...] it is both’, relating both to the environment and to the observer.<sup>12</sup> For Ian Hodder, affordances combine with archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan’s notion of ‘tendance’, characterized by a

Tightness to the interactions between things that is in large part produced by the ways in which thing processes have to fit together in sequences but that is also produced by the ways that things have qualities that object, stand in the way, and thus constrain what can be done.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A term coined by Edmund Husserl. For the English translation by Carr, see *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, pp. 108–10.

<sup>10</sup> Carruthers, ‘Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture’, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> See Ingold, ‘Point, Line and Counterpoint’, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Hodder, *Entangled*, pp. 115–16.

The medieval affordances of water were increased through the activities of the intellectual elite, adding new meaning through the constant use of biblical trope, rhetorical flourish, historical detail, literary motif, or any number of read and recreated forms. The complex processes of literary artifice and interrelated systems thinking validate Leroi-Gourhan, working in concert with synthesis and resistance in equal measure. The common currency of the Latinate churchmen and monastics featured here consisted of a collection of constructs drawn from a wide variety of sources, be they Scripture, trope, the classical *auctores*, theology, saintly *vitae*, contemporary commentary, treatise, or first-hand observation.<sup>14</sup> It was likely all of these things taken together in the melange of received and newly-acquired material that shaped medieval monastic thought on the matter. Within these diverse sources, we see the beginning of affordances shaped by the composition, arrangement, and ordering of images, the practice of memory. The result, as Mary Carruthers has proposed, is a gathering of diverse inputs into a complex space remembered and recollected through the composition of thought:

Because the art of memory was to such an important extent the basis of an art of composition, the primary goals when ‘preparing’ material for memory were flexibility, security, and ease of recombining matters into new patterns and forms. Recollection/invention is a ‘gathering together’ (*compositio*) into one ‘place’ (*locus*) of materials previously stored in memory as images (*imagines*).<sup>15</sup>

Tracing water as a set of *imagines* in memory available for rhetorical composition offers a unique glimpse into the internally cohesive structures of ordered thought in the Middle Ages. Ivan Illich has proposed that ‘[f]ollowing dream waters upstream, the historian will learn to distinguish the vast register of their voices’.<sup>16</sup> This study follows water into medieval thought of the High Middle Ages and that of monasticism, elucidating previously hidden structures within the broader logic of medieval metaphor

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the networks and the affordances that they enable are ‘rid-dled with dependencies’, as Hodder has put it. Thus, any use of water’s affordances implies an inherent interplay of power relationships, the dependence of things on other things, and the dependence of things and humans upon each other. Within the flexibility of water metaphor, we glimpse the hierarchies, powers, and co-dependencies of medieval epistemology at work. See Hodder, *Entangled*, esp. p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Carruthers, ‘Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture’, p. 10. It is important to note that another recent water-based book on early modern waterscapes is based on a concept of composition, drawing its own distinct mix of methodologies, including a strong emphasis on the philosophy of Bruno Latour. See Duckert, *For All Waters*. Duckert’s monograph forms an early modern companion piece to this research.

<sup>16</sup> Illich, *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, p. 7.

and thought-craft in the process. Like the dye used to map out paths through the human body in twenty-first century medicine, the significance granted to water reveals in passing the implicit structures of composition within the intellectual sciences of the twelfth century. The destinations are manifold and the paths complex, for the structures that are my focus stretch out to link loci scattered across the thought-scape of diverse thinkers, by means of diverse media, and via diverse tropes. The images that gave water form in the Middle Ages and continue to do so today are not wholly abstract, nor are they wholly material: they are an admixture of both.

Water is an orientational metaphor *par excellence*, in the terminology of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, a construct that ‘does not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another’, that is shaped by ‘up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral’.<sup>17</sup> For water, these metaphors derive from spatial arrangements such as a river’s journey from its source to its estuary, its flow from the heights to lowlands, the divisions and confluences of its flows, the variable depth of its waters, its meanders and obstructions, and even from the position of global waters — on a *mappa mundi*, for example. Waters orient the imagination, serving as a connector within the mapped-out structures of medieval thought, uniting content in a dynamic whole, which is gathered by the *ars memoriae* into a construct ‘built upon remembered structures “located” in one’s mind as patterns, edifices, grids, and — most basically — association-fabricated networks of “bits” in one’s memory that must be “gathered” into an idea’.<sup>18</sup> The so-called ‘method of *loci*’ was a key aspect of the medieval intellectual arts, and helps to explain the power of water; if the medieval art of memory was an art of spaces, then it was the orientational metaphor of water that allowed navigation between spaces, and represented their putative structural relationships.<sup>19</sup> By uniting disparate processes of flow and motion, transfer and intermingling into a unified schema derived from natural structures such as watersheds and hydrological cycles, water consolidates networks. For medieval minds, these flows offered a *ductus*, a textual narrative of purposive movement that could resemble the course of life itself.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 14. For Lakoff and Johnson deployed in water studies, see Jeanne Féaux de la Croix, ‘Moving Metaphors We Live By’, pp. 487–502.

<sup>18</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> For a seminal discussion, see Yates, *The Art of Memory*, pp. 93–113.

<sup>20</sup> Described by Mary Carruthers as ‘the movement within and throughout a work’s various parts’, reliant on movement because it is a composition that ‘guides a person to its various goals’. See *The Craft of Thought*, p. 78. See also ‘The Concept of *Ductus*’, pp. 190–213.

The argument for a form-based understanding of water as a key tool for the understanding of content suggests a formal interpretation of its meaning interrelated with and yet independent of content. Just as the *stemma* is a mode for apprehending the patterns of textual transmission, and the tree a mode for tracing lineage, water is a mode for showing the linkage of ideas that is appropriately flexible and agile, and similarly enmeshed with environment and ecological in its arrangement. An interrogation of ecological entanglement beyond concepts such as ‘nature’ or ‘culture’ is possible, aided by recent conceptual reframing of ecology by thinkers such as Ian Hodder and Timothy Morton.<sup>21</sup> The notion that something is wholly part of the ‘natural’ world ‘out there’ or part of the intellectual world is highly problematic and contested, and it not borne out within the case studies of this book. Environments — inner and outer — merge to form intellectual structures. If the symbolic and allegorical potential of water forms a vocabulary of ideas and moral tropes, then it is the structural and hydrological nature of water that forms the grammar, links the parts of speech. Aqueous ideas are paradigmatic, and hydrology is syntagmatic: the sum total of the former is expressed through the latter. The term that I assign to this phenomenon is ‘abstract hydrology’, a cycle of the mind, of episteme, and of thought-world given form by the evocation of its material counterpart.

The intellectual culture of twelfth-century monasticism and the temporal context of the broader twelfth century frame this narrative, but do not define the limits of its scope. In addition to providing a broader interpretation of water as an intellectual entity, the monastic context has thematic challenges of its own that this research addresses. The most significant contribution to the study of monasticism that my research aims to make is to improve understanding of the relationship between landscape use and inner life — water is a particularly germane, but by no means unique, aspect of this link. The complex interplay of interaction with external environment and shaping of internal environment mingled the two, making their boundaries indistinct. This mingling was embedded within the monastic context, and we learn much from an understanding of the effects brought about by intellectual entities that are hybrids of internal structure and external structure. In *Negotiating the Landscape*, Ellen Arnold proposes that the task of understanding the medieval relationship between imagination and environment requires a broad and flexible approach:

Monastic ‘environmental imagination’ was complex, and cannot be accessed directly, nor through any single body of evidence. Instead, we must read across the

<sup>21</sup> See Hodder, *Entangled*; Morton, *Ecology without Nature* and *The Ecological Thought*.

barriers of source genre, using both narrative and normative sources to reconstruct not only how medieval people used the environment, but also what they thought about the natural world.<sup>22</sup>

This is true not only of monasticism, but of the broader trends that frame it. The complex relationship between regulated inner lives and external encounters teaches us much about the environmental and intellectual history of the monks and canons who created the primary source material within this study. The cycle of environmental encounter, inner fashioning, and external expression is a key component of monastic thought.

In each of the case studies in this work, I test my core precepts and questions against three related and yet distinct contexts, and through three equally distinct textual readings of twelfth-century monastic literature. All of the primary source material, although written, is not primarily a *documentary* form of communication. Rather than representing information in a specifically textual format, each source is in fact an account of a memorial or intellectual experience. It captures in text the structure of a world visualized, shaped by mnemotechnics, and related to a teleology — be it salvific, spiritual, didactic, interpersonal or, as is more likely the case, a mixture. Accordingly, I have chosen to focus on the structure of my case studies — the aqueous shapes of their narrative — rather than the rich variety of their content. Each is a treasure trove of allusions to classical and Scriptural knowledge that bears further scrutiny, but it is not within the remit of this study to do so here. The intellectual worlds that they present are not consistently crafted and do not apply the rhetorical arts in the same way, but deploy shared colours applied to varied brushes.

The intellectual entities explored within my argument — rivers of thought, landscapes of ideas, agricultures of learning — are formed from every image conceivable to the mind and observable to the eye, drawing diverse content together to shape a mediating pattern that remains in motion, a machine of the memory and of the mind. This capacity need not be linked exclusively to water; indeed water is but one part of a mental world entirely formed and populated by entities of intellect. Just as an ecosystem is made up of countless components, so were the machines of monastic memory crafted from many parts. They were the space for thought, the means of thinking, and the ingredients of cognition in equal measure. This book is about their function, inspiration, and formal patterns. On another level, the studies within this book are about water, its properties, and their powerful influence on composition.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, p. 11.



The inner worlds of medieval thought had many manifestations, and so there is more to the model described within this work than its monastic focus alone — it explores the thematic subset of twelfth-century Western monasticism, and yet the scope of its conclusions extend beyond this area of inquiry. Although it presents a case study that reveals a new facet of medieval monasticism and its intellectual history, the applicability of theory within this study is broader than its argument. It can be related to all forms of water, and all parts of the hydrologic cycle, be they swamps, oceans, vapours, ice, or the myriad other forms in which one may encounter water. In other studies beyond the scope of this book, there is a growing embrace of this polyvalence within premodern academic discourse.<sup>23</sup> This model can also be applied to other medieval and post-medieval contexts, for each society constructs modes of thought through the modelling of space and connection based on fluid patterns. Water as an intellectual entity is a conceptual framework that appears in different configurations across time and culture — the reader may see it reflected in their own areas of expertise.

It is also important to note that while the literate monastics responsible for creating and propagating the primary source material within this study are not representative of medieval intellectual culture as a whole — although they are certainly well represented — they do provide many telling insights of wider applicability. From the specificity of monastic texts come wider engagements across permeable boundaries of social position, literacy, education, gender, language, and geography.<sup>24</sup> The story of water in medieval intellectual culture is also a story of power — its generation, application, conservation, and visualization. Not all medieval minds had access to these skills, for they were — in a sense that affected daily medieval life — elite skills. They required literacy, training, mastery of Scripture, time, and dedication to harness. These skills gave monastic thinkers great rhetorical influence, a power that was deployed to shape their inner lives, their environment, and others. By linking environment to intellection on a structural level, fluid monastic

<sup>23</sup> See Duckert, *For All Waters*, and PhD thesis, 'Waterscapes of Desire', for a broader exploration of waterscapes in an early modern context. For an expansion of my research here beyond its specific focus, see Smith, 'Fluid', pp. 115–31. For a broader treatment of aqueous materiality in different forms through an ecomaterialist lens, see Cohen and Duckert, *Elemental Ecocriticism*, with a particular focus on the essay by Cohen ('The Sea Above', pp. 105–33).

<sup>24</sup> This will become particularly apparent within Chapter 5, in which the ideas of a literate minority — the choir monks of the Cistercian Order — give abstract meaning to the labour of the illiterate lay monks, patterning the real landscape and turning bodies into parts within a construct of spiritual allegory.



modes of thought engineered the soul and moralized engineering. This book has force because it tells a story of environment changing as a result of purely abstract structures, and inner worlds teeming with environmental imagery.

The *literati* of twelfth-century intellectual culture were not the entire story, despite populating my case study. As Richard C. Hoffmann puts it in the context of environmental history, a bifurcation exists within medieval thought between an elite literate culture — defined by their regard for antique learning, Latin, and Scripture — and illiterate popular cultures — with traditions and forms of environmental knowledge based on spirits and non-human entities.<sup>25</sup> Medieval intellectual culture — and its use of water — cannot wholly be understood in abstraction, nor can it be understood from action alone. This book is a story of Hoffmann's literate subset of medieval society, and yet it intermingles with the illiterate and the quotidian, the practical application of knowledge and lived experience.

Consequently, this book should be understood as a study of the powerful, and the arts that they deployed to exercise and articulate their power — over the environment, over others, and over themselves — and yet also a study of the effect of their environment on their intellectual culture. These interactions, like monastic communities and monastic thinkers, were constructed based on variable factors. Individuals and communities constructed their own stories, wrought their own changes, and encountered their own limitations — their material contexts were equally diverse. Through the telling of these tales, glimpses of those groups excluded from the narrative emerge, and it is crucial to notice these absences.

In order to follow and to tell these stories, their composition, execution, vicissitudes, and social implications, I have spanned several disciplines. This book is a synthesis of approaches from these constituent parts — history, philosophy, and literary criticism — incorporating elements of all three. Its hybridity has outcomes in its constituent disciplines, and yet mingles them. In order to develop of model for the study of fluid thought, it was necessary to intermingle a consideration of the events, key moral and philosophical ideas, practices of thought and composition, and literary practices that created it. Like Michel Foucault, who admonished his readers to consider his work as a toolbox from which they should take that which was of greatest use, I see the influences of this study as mingled paradigmatic streams. To evoke the florid Latin formulations of my case studies, I have paused to sip and sample, combining their diverse liquids to form a mixed methodology.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> An oft-quoted notion originally from Foucault, 'Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir', pp. 523–24.

Yet in my admixture, I hope that I have provided a combination in which diverse flavours have been balanced.

The structure of the book is hybridized in the same manner as its disciplinarity, focusing on the shaping of a mental model and its expression in three case studies over clear-cut thematic divisions. It consists of a pair of theoretical essays followed by three case studies. Within the first chapter of the book, I explore some of the key principles of reading water as a metaphor and intellectual entity. I begin with a discussion of the modern problem of water interpretation, and the need to balance the broad appeal of water as a metaphorical entity with the specifics of medieval thought. I continue this discussion in the second chapter, exploring the problems of universality versus specificity within water interpretation in more depth. I discuss water as a metaphor for intellection, and its role in creating spaces for thought mapped out through aqueous imagery. I then discuss the role of water as a complex metaphor through consideration of the microcosmic representation of greater order through the systematic arrangement of a river system. The chapter continues by exploring the specific properties of water as an element, and the composition of traits through fundamental likenesses in the causative structure of life. The final section discusses the rhetorical *colores* (figures) of water, the affordances of the element for the shaping and articulation of argument and intellection.

Chapters 1 and 2 are designed to provide — beyond the scope of monastic studies alone — a broad introduction to the methodological and conceptual challenges of studying water as a complex metaphor, and to provide an insight into key debates in the study of water. The theoretical chapters have been separated from the case studies for two reasons. First, they operate independently from the twelfth-century context of the case studies, and can be read in their own right. Merging theory and case study would make this reading of the book impossible. Secondly, the theory within Chapters 1 and 2 applies equally to Chapters 3 to 5 — each functions in its own right, and interacts with its neighbours. As a result, this book is a reading of monastic literature and an argument with wider applicability to medieval intellectual culture in equal measure.

In the first case study, entitled '*An Unpolluted Spring*': *Godfrey of Saint-Victor's Fons Philosophiae and The Riparian Liberal Arts*, I explore a Victorine poem detailing an imagined navigation of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* as rivers springing forth from the lofty font of Theology. Within this arrangement, the branching delta of rivers evoked through the power of Latin prose sketches out all of the diverse contents of classical, biblical and scholarly knowledge, its patterns and its pitfalls, and the mystical contemplation of their origin.

The second case study, entitled '*Your Pen Poured Forth Good Words*': *Liquid Models in the Epistolary Style of Peter of Celle*, traces the movement of illustrative rhetorical devices within the letters of a well-connected Benedictine abbot and churchman. Peter deployed his encyclopaedic knowledge of scriptural trope and allegory together with the use of water as rhetorical device to sketch brief but potent sketches of the waterscape of knowledge. Although each taken individually appears as a small flourish, they add up to provide a clear vision of the landscape of learning, friendship, and epistolary exchange imagined by Peter and his fellow monastics.

In the third and final case study, entitled '*To Serve You as a Mirror*': *Spiritual Topography and Monastic Waterscape in A Description of Clairvaux*, I explore a Cistercian description of monastic landscape. The *Descriptio*, product of an anonymous commentator, maps out spiritual principles within a nature-textual representation of landscape for the purpose of Cistercian self-imagination. Through an account of the River Aube's percolation through monastic space for industry, contemplation, and spiritual parable, the text becomes an act of intellectual shaping in which the landscape is reviewed through the lens of spiritual contemplation, serving in turn to create a charged understanding of environment that reinforces monastic self-imagination and the contours of a thought-space.

Water illustrates points of connection between the shaping of organized metaphorical imagination and the wider thought-world of the Middle Ages; Scripture, environment, classical learning, and quotidian experience mingled and condensed for diverse purposes. Jacques Le Goff once claimed that 'psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology and the study of media have taught us that the life of men and societies depends just as much on images as it does on more palpable realities'.<sup>27</sup> We apprehend that the two are not only interconnected, but mutually derived. Tim Ingold suggests that 'the organism is not limited by the skin. *It, too, leaks*'.<sup>28</sup> One could easily say the same of the borders of thought-space — the membrane between the two worlds is far from impermeable. Extremely esoteric theory bleeds into daily action, and action infuses even the most rarified of abstractions.

The vitality of water is intrinsically linked to another essential trait, its ecological connotations. Water serves as an ideal reminder of the interconnectivity of all that it touches. It is difficult to overemphasize the metaphorical importance of water's life-bringing connectivity. Living as part of a largely agrarian society, medieval thinkers were frequently prompted to reflect upon a scriptural narrative shaped

<sup>27</sup> Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Goldhammer, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ingold, 'Point, Line and Counterpoint', p. 153. Italics from original.

by a desert culture that valorized the life-giving properties of water. Our choice of metaphor dictates the frame within which expression unfolds. The frequent valorization of new growth engendered by irrigation takes on more than a socio-cultural dimension. If connectivity and agriculture are metaphorically condensed, then the irrigation of the land cannot help but suggest other forms of connectivity, nor can connectivity fail to be agricultural. Such a phenomenon also touches upon the assumed aesthetics of order as understood by medieval culture. By arranging intellectual entities based upon a model of agriculture, medieval thinkers also posited a vision of what was pleasing within structure, what was right, and what was to be improved upon.

The medieval monastic world of water was shaped from a plethora of ideas, a nexus point between the practice of thought — morality, philosophy, eschatology, aesthetics, memory, composition, literature — the practice of environmental management — farming, cultivation, agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, animal husbandry — and the practice of human society — diplomacy, politics, monastic management of land, religious authority. A fluid mode of thinking is a spiritual expression, a means of understanding the natural world and its workings, and a means of mediating and exerting power in equal measure. Thinking about water as a medieval intellectual entity forces us to scrutinize diverse worlds — the world of thought, with its lofty abstractions, Scripture, and the classical tradition of learning; the world of monastic nature, with its fields, fishponds, buildings, rivers, and comings and goings; and the world of knowledge visualization, the often dizzying realms of abstraction generated by the mind's eye of the monastic imaginer. Water flows to power, and monasticism sought to understand, worship, and practice power across spiritual and quotidian dimensions of medieval life. This book is a theorization of this phenomenon, and a study of its application.



Figure 3. 'British Library Manuscript Additional 11695, Waters of Life (Beatus of Liébana, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*)', London, British Library, MS Additional 11695, fol. 209r. Late tenth century. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

## INTERPRETING WATER AS COMPLEX METAPHOR

The principal focus of this book — twelfth-century Western monasticism — should be understood as a subset of this metaphorical *milieu*. Before undertaking such a broad discussion, it is important to begin with a caveat: although it is necessary to understand how and why water is a conceptual metaphor, this should not immediately result in a reduction of all human expression to a series of catalogued tropes — water cannot be encapsulated by a list, a single mode, or a solitary interpretation. A notable example is the evocation of water in the Bible, a vision of ecology and hydrology of enduring cross-cultural and trans-historical meaning.<sup>1</sup> Scripture bound the apparatus of monastic meaning together in the twelfth century, linking divine and earthly wisdom through the interrogations of exegesis. In the twenty-first century, the same ideas continue to be read, to guide belief, and to shape thought-worlds:

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth standeth for ever. The sun riseth, and goeth down, and returneth to his place: and there rising again, Maketh his round by the south, and turneth again to the north: the

<sup>1</sup> Although the Bible is a piece of literature with broad applicability, many other cultures contain spiritual narratives with an equally complex comprehension of hydrology and ecology as abstract themes. The focus upon the Bible within this book is a result of my disciplinary and temporal focus, but not an endorsement of an exceptional status for Christian thought. The work of Veronica Strang, cited extensively within this book, demonstrates the full range of culturally diverse and cross-cultural commonalities exhibited by water in spiritual contexts, with particular emphasis on the beliefs and practices of Australia's indigenous peoples.

spirit goeth forward surveying all places round about, and returneth to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea doth not overflow: unto the place from whence the rivers come, they return, to flow again.<sup>2</sup>

The biblical book of Ecclesiastes is a salient example, for it speaks of the landscape and rivers of Israel, the abstract imagination of hydrology as metaphor for life cycle, and to any and all contexts and genres in which Scripture is read and interpreted in any of the Abrahamic religions, both in their places of origin and in every corner of the earth touched by their teachings. A list of tropes does not suffice to explain it, nor does a single and universal explanation encapsulate its meaning. As the passage later proclaims, ‘nothing under the sun is new’, and yet much has changed within the cognitive landscape of human beings.<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of water derives from a complex negotiation of commonalities and specificities across time and culture, forming the ingredients of a complex network for thinking in and with. I will explore the balance of approaches necessary for the reading of such a negotiation. To read the river cycle of Ecclesiastes, for example, requires a notion of cultural specificity, commonality, and the form(s) in which this scriptural passage can be made to evoke metaphors of world-view. There are many broad human truths to be gleaned, and yet infinitely more contextual contingencies. The same is true for diverse other examples, including those that constitute the subject of inquiry for this book. This discussion begins with a review of literature on the study of water in the Middle Ages, and an exploration of the idea behind water as a modern problem, as a balance of universality and specificity, and as an intellectual metaphor. The result of this metaphorical history, once revealed, is the dynamics by which water became a medieval intellectual entity, and combined with other such entities to form models of thought.

The shaping of a model of water as an intellectual entity has necessary political and social connotations for our understanding of the twelfth century, and the Middle Ages more broadly. To argue that thought, in a certain sense, is *made of* or *composed of* natural imagery is to propose a new mode of human-environmental interaction. Natural imagery is not ‘natural’ at all: it is named and expressed, shaped and crafted. A claim that something is natural is a reference to an artefact of human

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 1. 1–7. All Biblical quotations in this book take their English translation and numbering from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate. Scriptural references have been provided when relevant to discussion, but it should be understood that a great deal of the primary source material contains direct or indirect Biblical references or exegetic interpretations beyond the remit of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 1. 10.



sense-making. When discussing the wider umbrella of environmental humanities, Imre Szeman has argued that

At the heart of the environmental humanities is the insight that anything and everything deemed natural is, of necessity, cultural; how we name and frame our relation to the natural world and the environment is expressed through linguistic terms and concepts that explain and name it, is culturally contingent, and changes over time.<sup>4</sup>

The historically contingent language of water in medieval intellectual culture shapes the environment into an intellectual artefact, a tool, an expression of intellectual artifice. As mentioned in the introduction, Garipzanov argues that medieval visual literacy is also culturally contingent. Just as twenty-first century thinkers cannot understand natural resources without philosophy, so too does a medieval environmental humanities demand that water (and other environmental entities) cannot be discussed without intellectual history, ecotheory, and philosophy, and vice versa. This moves beyond the assertion that medieval people — and particularly medieval monastics — co-composed society in a dialectic relationship with nature. It implies that modes of thought fundamentally link daily physical life to the visualization of daily mental life in a manner that is generative, rather than purely rhetorical or allegorical. Not only did medieval people shape their environment based on spiritual ideas and explain their spiritual ideas in terms of familiar environmental patterns; the two are in fact part of a wider political ecology.

### *Surveying Medieval Water Studies*

The entanglements of this book are represented in a diverse range of constituent scholarly disciplines. Perceived as a Venn diagram, it would exist between the circles of the medieval intellectual arts, of medieval environmental history, and of water history. It is made possible by a supportive framework of existing research in these areas. The background literature, as it stands, has focused on water's symbols, tropes and *topoi*, and socio-political qualities, topics of interest to the history of water, the study of culture, and the study of literature alike.<sup>5</sup> This is unsurprising,

<sup>4</sup> Szeman, 'On the Energy Humanities; or What Can Philosophy Tell us About Oil (A Preliminary Sketch)?', p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> A particularly common manifestation of this trend focuses upon Biblical tropes and *topoi*. For a particularly influential exemplar that has continued to be heavily cited, see Underwood, 'The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels', pp. 41–138.



since these themes are some of the most expansive and rewarding areas of research in broader water history. It is my hope that my study will feed back into these areas, enriching their conclusions. The study of water is inherently interdisciplinary and multi-thematic, exerting a pull on material from every corner of medieval studies, as well as further foundational reading from a range of supplemental disciplines.

First, one of the most established areas of study concentrates on Scripture and liturgy. The biblical symbolism of water has been mapped out in studies of the liturgical, historical, and material culture elements of baptism within medieval church history, and within the centuries preceding it.<sup>6</sup> This discourse has continued within the study of theology and spirituality within the Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup> These studies connect to a broader theme of water history: the role of water within diverse global spiritual traditions. This research offers a vision of some of the commonalities involved in human spiritual engagement with water, their complexities, and their many variations. There have been anthropological projects engaging with comparative spiritual beliefs through the study of water imagery, with particularly notable contributions from Terje Oestigaard in the area of comparative religion, and Veronica Strang in the context of indigenous societies.<sup>8</sup> A 2013 themed edition of the *Worldviews* journal, guest edited by Strang, has provided a host of new studies, together with a volume introduction that surveys a great deal of the recent literature.<sup>9</sup> A parallel strand of social science research based around the relationship between agency and materiality has dovetailed with that focused upon water. These works are particularly relevant to this book, for they support the complex relationship between material culture and the human behaviour that underpins it.<sup>10</sup> To my

<sup>6</sup> For examples of books contributing to the study of baptism in the late classical, early, and high medieval eras, see Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages*; Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*; Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*. For a recent example, see Sonne de Torrens and Torrens, *The Visual Culture of Baptism in the Middle Ages*. We can see from a comparatively heavy emphasis on liturgical studies that not only the study of baptism but the study of religious ritual has come to speak loudly, both to the medievalist and to those seeking to use material on the Middle Ages to study other topics.

<sup>7</sup> For a historical view, see Weiss, 'A River Runs Through Them', pp. 40–43. For signs of continued use and adaptation, see Russell, 'Hydrotheology', pp. 161–84.

<sup>8</sup> This is something of a *passim* statement, since these themes run through the entirety of Oestigaard and Strang's publication trajectories.

<sup>9</sup> See *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 17 (2013), Special Issue: 'Living Water'. See in particular the introduction by Krause and Strang at pp. 95–102.

<sup>10</sup> The work of Tim Ingold, cited frequently, is the most apparent influence of the discourse of material agency upon this book. For a seminal study, see Gell, *Art and Agency*. For further

mind, the core themes of ritual purity and comparative religion that these studies explore are essential to the study of water. A great deal of the research I have referenced above is sociological, and this is no accident — to my mind, the key investigations of water in medieval spirituality are both comparative and rooted in a cross-cultural and trans-temporal understanding of human culture.

Secondly, the history of water — taken in a more literal disciplinary sense — has much to offer this study. The focus of research ranges across time from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and into modernity.<sup>11</sup> The disciplines of environmental history, the history of water management, and of hydraulics have focused on the use of technology, land management, and the logistics of everyday life. Paolo Squatriti, in particular, has covered a rich array of topics related to the use of water.<sup>12</sup> His research forms part of a larger discourse on hydraulic technology in the classical, medieval, and early modern periods.<sup>13</sup> Broader studies of environmental history have also sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of water in medieval culture and society. The history of water has often presented an interpretation of the Middle Ages mediated by a broader attempt to understand the relationship between water and society.<sup>14</sup> This includes an important collection of literature that blends history and philosophy, questioning the nature of

readings on this topic, see Bennett and Joyce ed., *Material Powers*; Coole and Frost ed., *New Materialisms*; DeMarrais, Gosden, and Renfrew ed., *Rethinking Materiality*; Dolphijn and van der Tuin ed., *New Materialism*; Hodder, *Entangled*; Knappett, 'Meaning in Miniature', pp. 87–109.

<sup>11</sup> There is an extensive and interesting discourse on water use within the study of the classical era that is not in the remit of this book, except in cases of reception outlined by some sources listed below.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Guillerme, *The Age of Water*; Squatriti, 'Marshes and Mentalities in Early Medieval Ravenna'; 'Water, Nature, and Culture in Early Medieval Lucca'; *Working with Water in Medieval Europe*; Magnusson and Squatriti, 'The Technologies of Water in Medieval Italy'; *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy*.

<sup>13</sup> See Astill and Langdon ed., *Medieval Farming and Technology*; Blair, *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England*; Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work*; Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages*; 'Water Technology in the Middle Ages'; Walton ed., *Wind and Water in the Middle Ages*; White ed., *Medieval Religion and Technology*.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of socio-cultural water history with contemporary applications, see in particular the History of Water series edited by Terje Tvedt and published by I. B. Tauris. See also an article partially arising from the research of this book, Morgan and Smith, 'Premodern Streams of Thought in Twenty-First Century Water Management'.

water and its conceptual role in human life.<sup>15</sup> Recent studies in this area have recognised that the history of water is an essential ingredient of water management and that premodern technologies of water management are themselves influenced by intellectual history. The technologies of water management and the history of its management are essential, but they are also inextricable from history and culture. Another strong and emerging trend — amplified by the growth of medical humanities — is an unfolding discussion of medieval hygiene and cleanliness, both ritual and bodily.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, the secondary source material on the medieval exercise of control over water resources demonstrates a precedent for the modern debate about water in the spheres of environmental philosophy and water management. There is further material of interest beyond the topic of water, interpreting the place of environment in the conceptual framework of humankind, often with a broad temporal scope. Recent years have seen environmental history take a turn towards interdisciplinarity and the broader environmental humanities, as epitomised in the study of monasticism.<sup>17</sup> At present, discourse surrounding water history is making great progress in interpreting the legacies of water beliefs in the present, but also in reassessing what water meant to past cultures, how it shaped their intellectual worlds, and how this is relevant to present and future crises.<sup>18</sup> Management of water and the practicalities of water use form the rhetorical vocabulary to discuss water in

<sup>15</sup> See in particular Linton, *What Is Water?*

<sup>16</sup> See Archibald, 'Did Knights Have Baths?'; Herbert McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion'; Kosso and Scott ed., *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*. See also Classen ed., *Bodily and Spiritual Hygiene in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, which contains an essay by the author entitled 'Caring for the Body and Soul with Water'. See also Smith, "'So the satiated man hungers, the drunken thirsts'".

<sup>17</sup> See in particular Arnold, 'Engineering Miracles' and *Negotiating the Landscape*. See also Arnold's ongoing project, entitled 'Cultural and Religious Views of Rivers in the Middle Ages', and her recent essay, 'Rivers of Risk and Redemption in Gregory of Tours' Writings'. For a review essay outlining the state of medieval environmental history and with a particular emphasis on water history, see Arnold, 'An Introduction to Medieval Environmental History'. For a comprehensive survey of medieval landscape history, see Cassidy-Welch, 'Space and Place in Medieval Contexts'.

<sup>18</sup> A particularly relevant example is Oestigaard, *Water, Christianity and the Rise of Capitalism*. Although it is not within the remit of this book, I have sought to link historical beliefs to future problems. See, for example, Smith, 'I, River?: New Materialism, Riparian Non-Human Agency, and the Scale of Democratic Reform'.

abstract terms, making these studies essential to my work. In the growing debate over energy humanities, it is argued that 'the dominant form of energy in any given era shapes the characteristics and capacities of societies in an *essential* way', building a complex of 'practices, beliefs, expectations and desires' surrounding the dominant source of energy.<sup>19</sup> As a result, its growing findings are a key environmental humanities contribution to the debate.<sup>20</sup>

Fourthly, water imagery has generated a great deal of interest as a trope or symbol within studies of landscape in literature and history, with the pastoral and paradisaical symbolism of water much in evidence.<sup>21</sup> Through these studies, scholars have deduced that the religious symbolism and iconography of water helped to shape the meaning of the landscape within medieval thought, a model ultimately derived from the template of Scripture, from Eden to Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Other spaces with a tightly woven web of garden-city symbolism appear within the study of medieval cities and monasteries.<sup>23</sup> The goal of these studies has largely been directed at a greater understanding of the role of *topoi* and images of water within medieval expressions of space and place.<sup>24</sup> These modes of inquiry have dovetailed with emerging trends

<sup>19</sup> See Szeman and others, 'On the Energy Humanities: Contributions from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts to Understanding Energy Transition and Energy Impasse', p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> For a survey of current thinking on the energy humanities, see especially Szeman and others, 'On the Energy Humanities: Contributions from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts to Understanding Energy Transition and Energy Impasse'; and Szeman and Boyer, *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the most oft-repeated version of this *topos* appears in the description of the *locus amoenus* or 'pleasance' in Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Trask, pp. 195–200, in which the *locus amoenus* is discussed at length. The book has been cited repeatedly on this topic for over fifty years, becoming something of an academic trope. For a critique of the problems associated with Curtius in the twenty-first century, see C. Stephen Jaeger's excellent article, 'Ernst Robert Curtius: A Medievalist's Contempt for the Middle Ages'.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of literature relating to this motif, see Miller, 'Paradise Regained: Medieval Garden Fountains'; Robertson, 'The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens'; Urban, 'Magic Fountains in Middle English Romance'.

<sup>23</sup> The monastery as a consciously shaped paradise has been thoroughly discussed in Constable, 'Renewal and Reform in Religious Life', and McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*. The City, as worldly space like paradise or the heavenly Jerusalem, is a salient example. See also Lilley, 'Mapping Cosmopolis' and 'Cities of God?', and 'The City as a Moral Universe', and Tuan, 'The City: Its Distance from Nature'.

<sup>24</sup> For a book of particular relevance to these developments in a twelfth-century monastic context, see Bruun, *Parables*.

within philosophy and anthropology that re-orientate our understanding of water, and of human society and environment by interrogating medieval ecological and environmental consciousness.<sup>25</sup> Recent and forthcoming work on elemental philosophy, ecocriticism, and ecomaterialism has sought to re-introduce the elements into the interpretation of medieval thought and literature, to consider the Middle Ages from an ecomaterial perspective, and yet to place the medieval in a broader context.<sup>26</sup> In short, there is a trend within the study of literature away from symbolic and taxonomic studies of water imagery, and towards the exploration of the relationship between literature and environment, a movement towards framing structure and away from content alone.<sup>27</sup> Medieval environmental imagination of water and its role in Christian soteriological thinking cannot be separated from its use as an abstraction, and scholarship is recognising this reality.

Finally, it is the arts of memory and expression that formed the framework by which water as a medieval intellectual entity could be expressed, and it is also important to acknowledge the growing sophistication of this field. Its vigour can be seen at the convergence point of medieval intellectual history and memory studies found within a 2012 issue of *Nottingham Medieval Studies* in honour of Mary Carruthers, and a 2015 festschrift for Martin Camargo.<sup>28</sup> To my mind, the essays included within these volumes demonstrate a meeting of disciplines within medieval studies — rhetoric, memory studies, the history of ideas, literary criticism, philosophy — that allows medieval water studies to be channelled into this study.

<sup>25</sup> The works of Stacy Alaimo, Jane Bennett, Tim Ingold, David Macauley, and Veronica Strang have been particularly germane for this book in this respect. I have merged anthropology and philosophy in this list, for both disciplines have contributed ideas that work together in a complementary manner.

<sup>26</sup> See in particular the themed volume of *Postmedieval* edited by Jeffrey J. Cohen and Lowell Duckert on the topic of 'Ecomaterialism' (vol. 4, no. 1, 2013). See especially O'Dair, 'Water Love'. For an important contribution from environmental philosophy, see Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*. See also Cohen, *Stone*.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Siewers, *Strange Beauty* and as ed., *Re-Imagining Nature*.

<sup>28</sup> See the themed issue of the *Nottingham Medieval Studies* journal edited by Laura Iseppi De Filippis on the topic of *Inventing a Path, Studies in Medieval Rhetoric in Honour of Mary Carruthers* (vol. 56, 2012) and Donavin and Stodola ed., *Public Declamations, Essays on Medieval Rhetoric, Education, and Letters in Honour of Martin Camargo*. These volumes are of particular value for taking the pulse of the convergent disciplines found within this book, containing applications of a wide range of intellectual history sub-disciplines to a series of medieval primary sources in diverse genres. For another strong volume on the topic, see Doležalová ed., *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*.

The use of water for fluid models of thought is an exercise in complex mnemotechnics, making both the core research and the variety of uses to which it has been put essential reading.

The result of the above trends is a collection of resources serving to support the specifically medieval study of water. The growing medieval studies corpus focused on environmental imagination and human interaction with the environment is a particularly felicitous trend in this respect for, like this book, it merges studies of the medieval past and its specificities with a broader engagement with the material and ecological entanglements of human life. It merges with the more traditional studies of water as historical entity, symbol, trope, and sociological actor outlined above. In addition, it is enhanced and made methodologically feasible by a solid foundation of sociology, religious and monastic history, literary criticism, and ecocriticism.

The tangle of themes, approaches, and disciplines that surrounds water can never be fully untangled, merely harnessed — as one might direct the flow of a river through a piece of human engineering such as a canal, lock, or drainage channel — for application to a particular problem. This is an approach that would be very familiar to the practitioners of the intellectual arts discussed in this study, who also drew from every corner of the medieval intellectual spectrum to solve problems and give a pattern to knowledge. It is no coincidence that the often turbulent eddies and flows of water should lend themselves to the visualization of complex intellectual problems. Just as twenty-first century scholars must borrow freely and merge creatively in order to narrate the role of water within medieval intellectual culture, so too did those making use of water's imagery gather together a confusing array of often dichotomous principles — shape and formlessness, directed learning and fancy, safety and danger, rigour and flexibility, clear patterns of navigation and ambiguity — into a workable model. It was the shaping of power and influence from the shapeless mass of unarticulated potential that was the corpus of medieval knowledge. In order to make sense of the process by which water was filtered, as knowledge was, from the realm of extreme abstraction and potential into clear, delineated, active applications of thought, we must understand our own puzzles and failings when it comes to understanding water as a complex metaphor.

### *The Modern Problem of Water*

The metaphorical power of water, like the power of the human mind to apprehend it, is far greater than the sum of its conceivable parts. Furthermore, the very definition of 'water' is often difficult to pin down to one clear meaning; it is slippery and eludes rigid categorization, as one might expect. Although science has tended

to treat water as  $H_2O$ , the molecule, there is another understanding of water: as a complex of concept, metaphorical structure, and cognitive meaning that all cultures seem to construct about, around, and with the experience of water. In the terminology of water studies, water is hydro-social: it cannot be understood in terms of its scientific materiality or economic utility alone.<sup>29</sup> It is the social form of water — the abstract entity — that offers much potential for human sense-making, and many problems. It is the intellectual dimension of water, distinct from (and yet entangled with) the scientific utility of water as ' $H_2O$ ', that provides a powerful fuel for the imagery of metaphor.

The material element that is water exists independently of humanity — we are made of it, but it is indifferent to us, on a scientific level — and twenty-first century minds often struggle to apprehend the intellectual dimension of water. And yet, the intellectual dimension is entangled with our material understanding of water, fed by it, as our ideas are fed by our material experience. By naming water, infusing it with words, ideas, valences, and moral force, we make it another thing entirely. It is us, and we are it. We think with water, it shapes us, and our actions are affected by this transaction: this is the hydro-social cycle at work. Thus, strictly speaking, there is no distinct intellectual dimension of water: the processes that create our ideas of water are recursive, and thus water is a hybrid entity that is both human and material. When we look to the metaphorical puzzle of water, we are viewing theory and practice:

[The hydro-social] process is cyclical in the sense that these hybrid objects are produced out of material, cultural and discursive practices, and they in turn enter into and constitute those very practices in a recursive manner. At the same time, the production of water as socio-nature entails a more complex (internal-relational) process by which any change in the physical presence of water, in institutional arrangements, in discursive constructions of water, or in the uses to which water are directed, has the potential to shift constellations of socio-nature towards a different set of relations.<sup>30</sup>

The recursive link between water and humanity generates metaphors for the expression of human activity that draw from the materiality of nature. Water is

<sup>29</sup> This distinction has become a crucial insight in the management of water. See Swyngedouw, *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water Flows of Power* and 'The Political Economy and Political Ecology of the Hydro-Social Cycle'. For recent debates on and insights into the notion of the hydro-social cycle, see Schmidt, 'Historicising the Hydrological Cycle' and Linton and Budds, 'The Hydrosocial Cycle'.

<sup>30</sup> Linton and Budds, 'The Hydrosocial Cycle', p. 174.



used, and shapes us in return, seeping into our linguistic expression of thought and deed. The institutional arrangements described above by Linton and Budds are underpinned by foundational metaphors — water as socio-nature is underpinned by metaphor. In *Metaphors We Live By*, now a seminal text on the understanding of metaphor as a building block of human activity, Lakoff and Johnson have proposed that ‘our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature’.<sup>31</sup> ‘The essence of metaphor’, they propose, ‘is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’.<sup>32</sup>

Since metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to metaphorical concepts in a systematic way, we can use metaphorical linguistic expressions to study the nature of metaphorical concepts and to gain an understanding of the metaphorical nature of our activities.<sup>33</sup>

The study of a culture’s common metaphors allows us to understand the nature of the structures of meaning that culture creates and lives by. Broadly speaking, the intellectual connotations of water remind us how deeply we rely on material qualities in order to think with dynamism, and yet simultaneously remind us that dynamism without form is chaos. Water captures the paradoxical nature of life: no matter how chaotic it may seem, it is a principle of order and of disorder for the mind in equal measure. It is filled with inconsistencies, just as human life is riddled with contradictions. The hydro-social arrangements that define daily life are understood in terms of these vicissitudes. Describing water can never exhaust its meaning, for it has a structure and logic, and yet reminds us of the infinite pluripotency of form that thought and the hydrological cycle possess. Behaviours are shaped, political actions articulated, and arguments advanced through a fluid complex of imaginings derived from socio-natural interaction.<sup>34</sup> Relationships are mapped fluidly, in the same way that the ongoing transactions between water and society continue to grow and change.

Water is an abundantly rich and fruitful subject for metaphorical structure. Through the guiding structural logic of the path that it has scoured for itself

<sup>31</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> One of the most promising areas of study in water history treats bodies such as rivers as ‘socio-natural sites’, a nexus of arrangements (harbours, dams, etc.) and practices (water management, culture). For a large-scale application of the methodology, see Winiwarter and others, ‘The Environmental History of the Danube River Basin as an Issue of Long-Term Socio-Ecological Research’, and more broadly, Singh and others, *Long-Term Socio-Ecological Research*.



across the face of the earth, the mobile waterscape is a myriad branching of lines of becoming wending through the landscapes of the planet, rivers wending through the landscape. They do not strictly connect anything to any other thing, but continue to move, bringing nutrition, hydration and vivification to the surrounding landscape.<sup>35</sup> There is not strictly such a thing as a river, but only the stages of the river: source, confluence, branch, estuary, and so on.<sup>36</sup> So it is with thought, for the matter of intellection is endlessly in motion, and yet its path leaves a deep pattern: mutability and stability in balance. The paths traced by thought form schemata, and these patterns can be diagrammatised and taught as a model for others. Once shaped, ideas can pass through these conduits in flows previously unimagined, an abstraction of hydraulic engineering.

More important still, extended metaphor shapes the way in which we make sense of situations, behave, and make decisions in the real world. Lakoff and Johnson use the metaphorical axiom 'Argument is War' as a case study; this is not only an effective way of describing argument, but to some extent *makes* argument a war:

It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war.<sup>37</sup>

What, we are asked, would happen if a culture linked argument metaphorically with dance? Debate and diplomacy would follow entirely different patterns, different behaviours would be valorised, and different decisions would carry moral weight. We must ask the same question of the metaphorical link between water and thought. Different metaphors carry different behaviours with them, and it is in this simple fact that the power of water is revealed. It is so strongly metaphorical that it represents thought across cultures, albeit in different manifestations. If argument is war, what is water? The terms used to define metaphor tell a story of cultural priorities. Warfare is a way of exerting power and influence, and thus its

<sup>35</sup> Tim Ingold references Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in claiming that 'the river, running under the bridge in a direction orthogonal to the road, does not connect anything to anything else. Rather, it just flows, without beginning or end, scouring the banks on each side and picking up speed in the middle'. Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 4.

metaphorical vocabulary gives force to assertive behaviour and expression. Water exerts power in a different way, and is useful for another register of persuasion and influence.

This is a point worth reflecting on at greater length, for asserting that human behaviour and political ecology are fundamentally shaped and driven by the framework of metaphor has important effects on our understanding of the Middle Ages. We have to ask ourselves: if our thinking is steeped in imagery based on a distinct, post-industrial imagining of nature, then what unforeseen chasms of reasoning might exist between our worldview and that of medieval thinkers? We and medieval people can both think of arguments in terms of war — admittedly very different modes of warfare — but what of our other registers? Can a scholar of the twentieth or twenty-first century truly ‘think medieval’ without a day-to-day experience of medieval aquaculture and water management? If one has never farmed or fished or built as a medieval person might, can one truly conceive of a medieval mode of thought? I am inclined to argue that they can, but only with preparation. We may be able to recover the relevant contextual knowledge, but it requires a peculiar form of rhetorical intellectual archaeology to piece together the components. This is an open question, and a significant one.

By exploring a fluid mode of medieval thought, by following the commonalities of water across time, we may be able to conceive of a more capacious understanding of medieval thought. Water, with its mutability, intimate relationship with human life, structural complexity, and diverse moral applicability, has ever been a powerful enabler of human conceptual frameworks. Water breaks down boundaries, allowing dialogues across time, culture, and context that would otherwise be impossible. As Terje Tvedt and Terje Oestigaard have put it, ‘water has played a role in all societies at all times and in the lives of all human beings’.<sup>38</sup> Despite the universality of water in comparison to practices of marriage, or diet, or habitation, water is equally part of another broad story, the human interaction with the elements. This commonality is a great power of water and its co-elements, and explains much of its metaphorical influence. However, there is a balance to be struck between the universal and specific meanings of water. We can recognise the broad meaning of water as a powerful metaphor for many intellectual activities, without forgetting which of myriad possible historical specificities of water we are discussing. Despite historical and cultural constancies across time and space, there is specificity to studying water derived from the unique manifestations of certain symbols and cultural constructs it evokes in different religious and cultural traditions. Waters from dif-

<sup>38</sup> Tvedt and Oestigaard, ‘A History of the Ideas of Water’, p. 2.

ferent contexts can be juxtaposed, mingled, and compared, and yet their specificity can be preserved. In short, we should not assume that water does not have very specific historically and culturally specific meanings across time and place just because it is an entity that has possessed universal cultural significance for human beings. Despite this historical and cultural specificity, it is equally important to remember the constancy of certain key symbolic and cultural connotations. There is specificity to studying water anchored in place by broad meanings, and yet differentiated by distinct historical contexts.

Without attention to the material nature of water, its study is not truly a study of 'water', but of the contexts in which water appears; it is a catalogue rather than a story. Without a historical framework in which to ground interpretation, water teaches much of *what* water *can* mean, but little of *why* it might mean these things. The result of multiple historical interpretations is not 'water' in a universal sense (the water of 'H<sub>2</sub>O'), but 'waters'. This notion is best described by Tvedt and Oestigaard as 'worlds of water', those 'numerous life-worlds and webs of significance people have spun around water as natural phenomena'.<sup>39</sup> Water, they continue, 'dissolves the traditional boundaries in Western cultures between science and religion, facts and beliefs, the sacred and the profane, and questions the scientific method and approaches by which we seek to analyse the world'.<sup>40</sup> Taken as a wholly scientific entity, as two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom, the cultural significance of water cannot be fully apprehended. Studying the conceptual and cognitive constructions of water forces us to reconstruct different epistemologies to modern scientific ones, for it is social and scientific in equal measure. This is true for the Middle Ages, the generator of epistemes derived from natural philosophy and religion in equal measure. This book embraces the notion that medieval thought and medieval thinking about 'medieval' water is part of a greater story, and yet functions on its own terms, with its own rules, and within its own thought-world. It is part of a greater story that flows through many life-worlds and thought-worlds, each of which is unique, and each of which challenges many of our interpretive norms.<sup>41</sup> Only when these 'waters' recombine into a many-splendoured story of

<sup>39</sup> Tvedt and Oestigaard, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>40</sup> Tvedt and Oestigaard, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

<sup>41</sup> Terje Oestigaard has written many other articles exploring many 'waters' with a sound mix of historical specificity and universal meaning. See, for example, 'Christianity and Islam as Nile Religions in Egypt'; 'From Death to Life — The Hydrological Circle of Cosmos and Copulation'; 'Heavens, Havens and Hells of Water'; and 'The Topography of Holy Water in England after the Reformation'.

water can we see both the specificities that add nuance to a rich intellectual history, and the sweeping commonalities that unite it.

Despite the complexities of water as imagery and as metaphor within diverse contexts, a study of specifically medieval metaphors of water should acknowledge their basic commonality with what seems an essential human experience. It must be admitted that across time, across place, we as human beings *feel* water on an intuitive and fundamental level, in spite of our endless investigation of its place in human culture, life, and thought. David Macauley describes this effectively:

Beneath all this discussion [...] the most compelling force at work may be that most humans simply prefer the aesthetic appearance of a wandering river or a wiggling stream to a linear flow. There may in fact be something within our learned or acquired perceptual sensibilities that loves the fluid, serpentine or meandering movement of fluids, perhaps originating with a form of 'biophilia' that emerged from our evolutionary past as we humans have lived near flowing waters over many millennia.<sup>42</sup>

This can also be interpreted, conversely, as an implication that human beings *fear* water, and that this shapes our relationship. Just as we like water, we simultaneously distrust its fickleness, be it a torrential river, a roiling ocean, or a violent event such as storm or flood. In a medieval context, biblical tales of hydrophobia — the Flood, the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea — co-exist with joyous imagery such as the Psalmist's love of nutritive imagery, of new life brought forth by water's life-giving qualities. Despite the multiplicity of the worlds of water within this book, it is also true that water has certain essential traits that transcend time and culture. Water unites the human and the non-human in a shared story of emotional ambiguities that dissolves the rigid dichotomies of nature and culture. The same is true of the wider elemental tetrad of earth, air, fire, and water, and yet water does so with unique affordances. Water binds humanity together across vast gulfs of time and understanding, and this commonality is something to be valued as a tool for inquiry.

To veer too far away from acknowledging the commonality of water into excessive medieval exceptionalism would be a misleading move, and one that I do not intend to advance. Furthermore, it would negate one of the strongest powers given to water, its accessibility to both medieval and modern minds. Water is highly specific to time, culture, and place, and yet it binds the metaphorical imagery of diverse

<sup>42</sup> Macauley, 'The Domestication of Water'.

human beings together in a valuable bridging act. One must always remember when engaging in a hermeneutics of water that, as Veronica Strang has put it,

Water's diversity is, in some respects, a key to its meanings. Here is an object that is endlessly transmutable, moving readily from one shape to another: from ice to stream, from vapour to rain, from fluid to steam. It has an equally broad range of scales of existence: from droplet to ocean, trickle to flood, cup to lake.<sup>43</sup>

Like systems of ideas, water is endlessly flexible and undergoes constant transmutation and translation from context to context in its never-ending journey through the hydrological cycle. It is little wonder, by such logic, that water binds the diverse human cultures of the world together in a shared experience, a phenomenon that Strang memorably describes as 'common senses'. I support the proposition that 'water's diversity is, in some respects, a key to its meanings'.<sup>44</sup> This is especially true of the caveat *in some respects*. Strang makes a valid point about the commonalities of perception within water that is worth considering:

The ways in which humans experience [...] fluid qualities are as diverse as the contexts in which this interaction occurs. Clearly there are some aspects of engagement with water — particularly in landscapes dominated by ice, or by other extreme conditions — that are highly specific to these environments, but even in these there are some experiences of water that are more broadly shared, and opportunities to observe universally consistent hydrological processes. Thus, if we accept that most of the qualities of water are present in most environments, and the 'multiple sensory pathways' engaging with them recurs cross-culturally, it is possible to pursue some broad themes.<sup>45</sup>

As Strang points out, experience of water as hydrology is a shared experience, and yet medieval thought still plays by its own rules. Strang's ideas apply just as well to variation across time as they do to variation across different landscapes. Strang's 'common senses' argument is appealing to the historian, for it is essentialist but *also* relativist in a well-tuned balance. Broad themes are desirable within the interpretation of water as long as they produce rather than reduce meaning. They must allow room for flexibility and adaptation while simultaneously embracing the psychosocial commonalities of water.

<sup>43</sup> Strang, 'Common Senses'.

<sup>44</sup> Strang, 'Common Senses', p. 99.

<sup>45</sup> Strang, 'Common Senses', p. 99.

### *Universality and Specificity*

We, our medieval forebears, and humans to come, have all experienced, and will all experience water. And yet, as Heraclitus would remind us, ‘Everything changes and nothing remains still [...] and [...] you cannot step twice into the same stream’.<sup>46</sup> No experience of water is truly identical to another, and no imagining of water is ever the same. Our modern epistemic frameworks encourage us to learn that similarities in nature, although they may be prompted by scientifically quantifiable laws and patterns, are a matter of human interpretation. Things are not metaphorically linked because they are alike at some fundamental level, but because thinking makes it so:

Metaphor is, in general, not based on similarity, as we argued throughout this book. Instead, it is typically based on cross-domain correlations in our experience, which give rise to the perceived similarities between the two domains within the metaphor. For example, the persistent use of a metaphor may create perceived similarities, as when a love relationship, conceived of metaphorically as a partnership, goes awry when responsibilities and benefits are not shared equally.<sup>47</sup>

Ivan Illich has argued that ‘as a vehicle for metaphors, water is a shifting mirror. Water remains a chaos until a creative story interprets its seeming equivocation as being the quivering ambiguity of life’.<sup>48</sup> The story goes as follows: we shape water, mould it, give it meaning through our inner workings. We parse it into categories of metaphorical meaning. Yet such statements, like many other modern arguments, are contrary to the spirit of the medieval intellectual approach, which proposes water has a fundamental essence, the subtleties of which are revealed through inquiry. The medieval transactions between intellection and material experience are shaped by a different set of philosophical principles, and failing to account for them leads to misreadings of water. In the context of water cleanliness, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard summarised the problem eloquently, arguing that applying modern mentalities to historical material presents its own problems:

A rationalistic thinker meditating on an ancient text — with limited psychological knowledge, such as our classical education so often produces — brings his

<sup>46</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, 402a.

<sup>47</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, pp. 244–45.

<sup>48</sup> Illich is far more concerned for the historical specificity of water interpretation than others, and yet many of his observations encounter difficulties in a medieval context. Illich, *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, pp. 24–25.

precise knowledge like a recurrent light to the data in the text. No doubt he realizes that knowledge concerning the purity of water was very unsound in those days. But he thinks, nevertheless, that this knowledge corresponds to very specific, very clear experiences. Under these conditions, interpretations of ancient texts are often *overly clever readings*.<sup>49</sup>

This is certainly the case for the study of medieval intellectual culture — modernity makes us ‘overly clever’ (that is to say, overly scientific) in our readings of medieval texts.<sup>50</sup> For a medieval intellectual, for example, natural meaning would not be deemed a product of human intellection: a thing already meant something, even if human faculties were unable to decipher its code. Water had the potential for chaos remaining within it from its primordial state, and yet it was tamed by the power of God at the beginning.<sup>51</sup> The shifting mirror humans saw in water was not the product of water itself, but of the vagaries of human perception. Water as intellectual metaphor for modern thinkers is a satisfying, essential, and everlasting image of fluidity. Water as intellectual metaphor for medieval thinkers was a *proof* of divine order. It did not simply *explain* thought through nature but *justified* the structure of thought through nature. Just as reading a premodern text with the assumption of a clear and shared understanding of cleanliness — as Bachelard cautioned — is a mistake, so too is reading with an assumption of shared causation. How then, can we reconcile seemingly incompatible frameworks for the interpretation of water?

Strang proposes that water ‘retains its fluidity and transmutability in all contexts, and is therefore ubiquitously employed in metaphors concerned with flow, movement, and change over time’.<sup>52</sup> I offer a point of departure for the scholar of medieval intellectual history that takes account of the broad polyvalence of water while preserving a historicity of interpretation proper to the study of medieval thought. The extreme of an essentialist reading of water is perhaps best epitomised by the work of Mircea Eliade, a great believer in the universal and essential nature of water (and, indeed, of all symbols). The eternal semiological qualities of water, he argued, could never change, only grow in potentiality:

<sup>49</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, trans. by Farrell, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> We should recall that Bachelard was a scientist before he was a philosopher — his scientific positivism and belittlement of ancient knowledge sit uncomfortably with medievalists. This aside, his point stands: we read science into older models, and then interpret our source materials anachronistically as a result.

<sup>51</sup> ‘And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters’. Genesis 1. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Strang, *Gardening the World*, p. 30. See also *The Meaning of Water*.



[...] the universal aquatic symbolism was neither abolished nor dismembered by [historical interpretations]. In other words: History cannot basically modify the structure of an archaic symbolism. History constantly adds new meanings, but they do not destroy the structure of the symbolism.<sup>53</sup>

The passage is problematic and yet fruitful. The notion of ‘the universal aquatic symbolism’ is an absurdity within the epistemic culture we inhabit, and yet Eliade has a point. Problems aside, it is true that there is a Judeo-Christian interpretation of water that contains a core of tropes and idioms not created, but inherited. Eliade presents a mixture of generalization and astute observation. We do indeed inherit a legacy of archaic water symbols from our forebears, as did medieval thinkers from theirs. Yet the reception of Aristotle in the High Middle Ages created a *medieval* Aristotle, and likewise the reception of water symbols in the Middle Ages — be they from Scripture, history, philosophy, or simply from human intuition — created a *specifically medieval* water.<sup>54</sup> For the historian of medieval ideas, then, Eliade’s logic does not stand.

The psychoanalytic tradition of water interpretation has long sought to track our engagement with water to something primal, something indivisible, something eternal. This interpretation is certainly not a falsehood, and yet an uncritical acceptance of this fact is problematic. William Niederland has expressed this link as a psycho-geographical formulation, a hypothesis that the space within mirrors the hydrology of the world without:

How closely the ideas of river and body are connected can be seen in such terms as ‘river-head’ (source), ‘arm’ (branch) and ‘mouth’. According to Onians (1951) the source of a stream is called its head because of the ancient belief that the head contained the life-fluid, the seed, and thus the source of life.<sup>55</sup>

Niederland’s book follows the logic of Eliade, and yet uses psychoanalytic methodology to make its point rather than semiotics. The problem with such interpretations is not that they are untrue, but that they propose to *explain* all human

<sup>53</sup> Eliade is referring specifically to the symbolism of baptism in this passage, but switches to a much broader claim. If anything, this strengthens the message that universalizing water leads to occlusion of historical detail. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. by Trask, p. 137.

<sup>54</sup> Terming the water in this book ‘medieval water’, like any specific conception of water, is an effort to break down the monolithic entity known as ‘water’ in the twenty-first century. This approach should also be taken within the umbrella term of ‘medieval’ water to see further waters within. See Hamlin, “‘Waters’ or ‘Water’?” — Master Narratives in Water History and Their Implications for Contemporary Water Policy’.

<sup>55</sup> Niederland, ‘River Symbolism — Part I’, p. 18.



interaction with water under one unchanging rubric. Specificities emerge, but they are all part of an eternal pattern.<sup>56</sup> This is content-based analysis of tropes applied universally across history. It is at this point that I break away from the argument, for this approach relies upon a raft of assumptions that oversimplifies the medieval interpretation of water.

By the same logic, we must also avoid treating the domain of water as a complex code of symbols, universal in meaning and yet historically specific in manifestation. A study of symbolism is rewarding, for it gives a taxonomic possibility of capturing all the qualities that water *can mean*, what it *meant*, why symbolism *allows it to mean*. And yet, it plays into a debate in which water is exhaustible in its meaning, in which it is but a manifold representation of what we humans place within it. It also, most crucially, forces us to interpret medieval texts through a schema that is not part of their thought-world. It creates water that, although a potent metaphor and symbolic wellspring, is always about *us*, as Jamie Linton argues:

Water is what we make of it. This is not a particularly novel assertion. The philosopher and historian of religions Mircea Eliade wrote that water ‘is *fons et origo*, the source of all possible existence [...] it will always exist, though never alone, for water is always generative, containing the potentiality of all forms in their unbroken unity’. Everyone knows that we can’t exist without water. But neither can water, as *fons et origo*, exist without us. We give to water that which enables it to realize its potential. All by itself, water is supremely fluid, fluctuating, fleeting. We mix language, gods, bodies, and thought with water to produce the worlds and the selves we inhabit.<sup>57</sup>

Thinking of the *longue durée*, I agree with Linton’s assessment. And yet to believe this idea, to participate in this discourse, is to break sharply from anything resembling a medieval thought-world. The notion that humanity *invented* the idea of water, that we thought it into being, ignores structures within medieval thought that place responsibility for meaning far beyond human control within the realm of God. Linton has appropriated *fons et origo*, a medieval concept, and reframed it in terms of human composition. This is an argument that is logical today, and yet problematic when applied to medieval thought.

Much of the symbolic interpretation of water highlights the scriptural or literary provenance of the source material; it presents the view that water is a trope

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Norwick, *The History of Metaphors of Nature*, a two-volume compendium of metaphors and symbols mapped out in taxonomic but minimally critical detail.

<sup>57</sup> Linton, *What Is Water?*, p. 3.

to be played, strategically, like a card in a deck of symbolism.<sup>58</sup> These studies are often invaluable, and advance knowledge of their source material. This is often not enough, however, if one has made water itself the topic of inquiry; symbolism is not a cause of water's affordances, but an effect. As Marcia Colish has proposed succinctly, argument by symbol alone is not an explanation of medieval thought:

People who read books on the medieval mind are familiar with the dictum usually found on page one of any book on this subject: 'Medieval man thought in terms of symbols'. People who write books on the medieval mind acknowledge the symbolic mentality of the period with impartial and relentless frequency. Whether cited to attest to the clairvoyance or obscurantism, the subtlety or primitivism, the uniqueness or the universality of the Middle Ages, the symbolic attributes of the medieval mind have by now acquired the unexcogitated and prescriptive status of *idée reçue*.<sup>59</sup>

If we combine the axioms 'water is always water' and 'medieval people thought in terms of symbols', then we arrive at the conclusion that water in medieval symbolism is simply a tool at hand. Scripture has water in it, medieval people knew water, and therefore there is water in medieval intellectual discourse.<sup>60</sup> The task remains to map out these symbols, and to understand their provenance, use, and qualities. And yet such an approach is reductive rather than productive. Symbolism is essential to understanding water, and yet mapping symbols without understanding the foundations of symbolicity is prone to confusion. Moreover, as Colish proposes, it has the potential to introduce uncritical errors in interpretation:

The assertion that medieval men thought in terms of symbols is usually treated as a canon of explanation. It has rarely been treated as susceptible to explanation itself. More rarely still have those who study the place of symbols in medieval

<sup>58</sup> For volumes with many essays that interpret water by means of symbols and tropes, see Kosso and Scott ed., *The Nature and Function of Water*, and James-Raoul and Thomasset ed., *Dans l'eau, sous l'eau*.

<sup>59</sup> Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, p. vii.

<sup>60</sup> This has a tendency to result in studies of water in which the historical context of water becomes a function of symbolism, and this symbolism is read in relation to modern cultural behaviour. See in particular Bouguerra, 'Water: Symbolism and Culture', which is exhaustive in cross-cultural detail and of high quality, and yet implies that a study of water is intrinsically a study of lists — water means this list of things, and the list explains it. Although Bouguerra is primarily aiming to provide a *précis* rather than a critical study, what is not discussed within the report is as telling as what appears. A study of cultural context and application is more profitable, as in Classen, 'The Symbolic Meaning of Water in Medieval Literature', pp. 245–67. See also Classen's book, *Water in Medieval Literature*, for a further expansion of this approach.

epistemology avoided the tendency to interpret them in anachronistic or otherwise extraneous terms.<sup>61</sup>

There is, as Colish's argument would suggest, an entire genre of explanation devoted to the symbolism of water. The principal problem with texts of this genre is that they tend to treat water as part of a process to explain something else (religion, culture, holiness, narrative, and so on), and in doing so tend to ignore what is true of water *in itself* in a particular context. Water does explain other concepts through its symbolism, and yet this is an incomplete picture. Much of the power of water as metaphor in a medieval context stems from its power to act as the environment and vehicle for meaning, not as the meaning in itself, as the medium rather than the message. Speaking metaphorically, it is an entity of content and of form in equal measure.

It is easy to claim that water provides many satisfying metaphors for human thought, life, and imagination, to imply that humans are diverse and yet water is, 'essentially', *always just water*.<sup>62</sup> Water interpretation requires an attention to historical detail, for as Ivan Illich has argued, '[n]ot only does the way an epoch treats water and space have a history...[but also] the very substances that are shaped by the imagination — and thereby given explicit meanings — are themselves social creations to some degree'.<sup>63</sup> Although water is never conceptually accessibly to human interaction as *just* water, and takes the shape of what we make of it, we must be attentive to the manner in which these diverse meanings manifest in particular historical contexts. This is especially important when considering a medieval intellectual context, since it must be approached from different intellectual premises than our own.

There is nothing 'natural' about water imagery; it is not an essential and eternal reality of human ontology that never adapts, never changes; it is a construct. For the medieval thinker, water was far from a simple explanatory device. Medieval Christians *knew* by the power of their faith that the origin of this mystery could be explained, and that to do so one need only turn one's eyes to the heavens, and downwards to the interrelated chain of divine creations that was nature. The meaning of water was inherited from Antiquity and modified by Christian thought, and yet the entire epistemic world of the interpreter defined the logic of water.<sup>64</sup> This

<sup>61</sup> Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, p. vii.

<sup>62</sup> Even in metaphor, water has taken on the characteristics of 'H<sub>2</sub>O', a 'stuff' created by industrial society rather than something less instrumental and more ontological. See Ivan Illich, *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, esp. pp. 3–11.

<sup>63</sup> Illich, *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

world was a combination of universalities and specificities, historically constituted ideas and ‘common senses’, and yet was shaped by spiritual ontology.<sup>65</sup>

The flow of the world’s hydrological systems ties in with our notions of human embodiment, the equilibrium of our lives, and the structures of our thoughts themselves, and yet these factors are culturally specific. The gulf of time separating us from the Middle Ages makes assumptions regarding the commonality of modern and medieval interpretations problematic. Experiences of interaction with water are something that we can all share, and yet belief defines interpretation. In order to overcome these pitfalls, a good approach avoids confusion between modern and medieval ideas of metaphor, shuns over-universalization of water interpretation, and yet avoids curmudgeonly repudiation of cross-temporal and cross-cultural commonality. Historicism and universality are both valid, and yet they are neither mutually exclusive nor synonymous.

### *Approaching Water as Intellectual Metaphor*

Thinking of water is an act replete with possibility: the sounds, sights, motions, and colours mingle within the imagination to create a satisfying and deep amalgam of disparate forces. It is a material of certain puzzles and frustrations for the human interpreter, and with manifold hidden worlds beyond the purview of human life. Thinking *with* water takes the complexities of water as a palette from which to paint a picture of inner life, to populate the spaces of the mind with entities human, material, artificial, natural, to create a world *within which to* think, a world to think *with*.<sup>66</sup> This is a concept that has been advanced in the form of the cognitive ecology, a theory arguing that ‘an understanding of cognitive phenomena must include a consideration of the environments in which cognitive processes develop and operate’.<sup>67</sup> Modern cognitive science, it seems, suggests that causal factors explaining

<sup>65</sup> For a doctoral thesis that explores these themes in classical Arabic poetry (pre-and post-Islam) through Bachelardian phenomenology, see Alardawe, ‘The Poetic Image of Water in Jāhili and Andalusian Poetry’. Alardawe concludes that her subject matter contains pre-Islamic archetypes that were modified by religion, culture, and geography in later poetry, but also reveals a phenomenological commonality between cultures. See especially pp. 339–41.

<sup>66</sup> For an edited volume that has gone far in exploring this notion, see Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis ed., *Thinking with Water*.

<sup>67</sup> Hutchins, ‘Cognitive Ecology’, p. 706.

patterns within a modality may lie within the patterns of other modalities.<sup>68</sup> Thus, inner patterns partially explain interactions of the body and with the environment, and external patterns conversely influence the pattern and function of inner modes. This insight has been transferred into the realm of literary and performance studies to advocate closer attention to 'the multidimensional contexts in which we remember, feel, think, sense, communicate, imagine, and act, often collaboratively, on the fly, and in rich ongoing interaction with our environments'.<sup>69</sup> We may also imagine this phenomenon to be a form of cognitive extension, a diffuse network of sense-making beyond the brain-bound processes within.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of medieval thought, the cognitive ecology formed was both universal in experience and shaped by the structural specificities of sense-making in the Middle Ages. Mary Carruthers has proposed of the Middle Ages that 'in order to develop the memory into a powerful engine of invention, it was conceived of in spatial and locational terms like a kind of map, with its places and routes plainly marked'.<sup>71</sup> The cognitive system that I present conforms to this model, for every distinct thought-world can be imagined to have such a map complete with its own coordinates, loci, and units of measurement. In each map, however, water forms a mediating principle, a fluid network for linking idea to idea, cause to effect. The rules differ, and yet the prominence of water remains. The locational mediation of water creates what John Urry has termed *scapes* and *flows*, the networks of paths by which abstract connections are formed and navigated, and the intellectual matter directed through them:

Scapes are the networks of machines, technologies, organizations, texts and actors that constitute various interconnected nodes along which flows can be relayed. Such scapes reconfigure the dimensions of time and space. Once particular scapes have been established, then individuals and especially corporations within each society will normally try to become connected to them through being constituted as nodes within that particular network.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Hutchins, 'Cognitive Ecology', p. 710.

<sup>69</sup> Tribble and Sutton, 'Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies', p. 94.

<sup>70</sup> See Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, p. 45, in which the author argues that the creation of material symbols 'creates a new realm of perceptible objects upon which to target basic capacities of statistical and associative learning'.

<sup>71</sup> Carruthers, 'Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture', p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Urry, 'Mobile Sociology', p. 193. For more sociologically derived fluid space terminology, see Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* and Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*.

This book studies the process by which the qualities of water, a sensibly apprehensible natural entity, came to fill the mind as a mediator of interior space, a mapper of its boundaries, and a flexible pattern of sense-making, made through its similitude to the structure of intellection itself.<sup>73</sup> Water provides a framework through the hydrological pattern of its arrangement, and fills intellection with flows passing from locus to locus in a material representation of sense-making. Each of my case studies presents a scape mapped out in words, its flows the conduit of meaning.

The abstract hydrology within this book was a system of intellection bonded to a material metaphor that was uniquely medieval, despite sharing many commonalities with other thought systems. The intellectual entity provides both an aid to the demarcation and mapping of inner space, and the motive transfers that bring systematic function and process to this space. It demonstrates an awareness of what Svend Østergaard describes as 'force dynamics', an abstract understanding of force-related principles beyond experience-based correlations between cause and effect. We understand that an object at rest can be put into motion, and that certain objects have an inherent tendency to motion.<sup>74</sup> The strategic modelling and deployment of abstract forces is a faculty that separates us from our simian ancestors. The deployment of an observed force dynamic in new and unusual situations demonstrates the power of mental modelling and the uniquely medieval facets of this faculty. Monastics, trained in practices of abstract contemplation, were well-prepared for the deployment of scapes and flows to manipulate force dynamic potentials for intellectual ends.

It is, to my mind, no exaggeration to claim that visible representation of that which is non-verbal and non-literary was the very essence of monastic thought, its motive force, and its life-blood.<sup>75</sup> In order to develop a pedagogical framework to address the problems of complex inner visualization, a comprehensive network of monastic intellectual imagery was required that communicated form, content,

<sup>73</sup> Carruthers describes similitude or 'likeness' not as the likeness of exact copies, but as a schematic drawing seeking to represent an object. Carruthers, 'Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture', p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Østergaard, 'Imitation, Mirror Neurons and Material Culture', p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> A claim substantiated by the interest in the topic demonstrated within the ongoing Brepols *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* series. Within this debate, see in particular Mostert ed., *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*; Hageman and Mostert ed., *Reading Images and Texts*; and de Nie, Morrison and Mostert ed., *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.

proper behaviour, a sense of motion, and, above all, a sense of metaphysical scope.<sup>76</sup> The stakes were high, for to dwell within a world of persistent and ever-relevant metaphysical influence is to demand a rigorous, powerful and flexible system of representation. When abstractions have intellectual currency, sophistication and elegance are markers of prestige and devotion alike, like a particularly fine treatise, sermon, gloss, manuscript, or piece of devotional art.

In the realm of intellectual metaphor, as is the case for thought in general, everything refers to everything, but the paths by which something is linked to something are telling. Structures differ depending on their context, and the media by which they are facilitated. In a step towards a more interior understanding of the hydrological cycle, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux explicitly connected the functioning of the terrestrial waters to a spiritual and interior abstraction.<sup>77</sup> There is no point at which scriptural exegesis ends and evocation of natural order begins; all modes are carried out simultaneously:

If all waters seek incessantly to return to the sea, making their way thither sometimes by hidden and subterranean channels, so that they may go forth from it again in continual and untiring circuit, becoming visible once more to man and available for his service, why are not these spiritual streams rendered back constantly, and without reserve to their legitimate source, that they may not cease to water the fields in our hearts? Let the rivers of diverse graces return from whence they came that they may flow anew. Let the heavenly shower rise again to its heavenly source, that it may be poured anew and still more plentifully upon the earth.<sup>78</sup>

Through the imagery of Ecclesiastes that appeared as an epigram to this chapter, the sights, sounds, and touch of water, the reader might come to bond river, life, spirit, Scripture, and history in one great gathering. In the passage from Bernard above, this image of a fluid path for life and knowledge is placed in a distinct context and tied to the realm of spiritual metaphor. The implications of this gathering, interpreted in a particular time, place, and intellectual culture, enabled diverse meanings. By merging mind and environment into a collection of affordances, the experience and intellectual *use* of water encountered in mind and environment bonded intellection and phenomenon. These uses were both shared and distinctly medieval.

<sup>76</sup> For some particularly useful monastic case studies for the role of this process in the narration of the self, see van't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*.

<sup>77</sup> For further discussion of Bernard of Clairvaux's rhetoric and the evocation of the elements, see Warrenner Smith, 'Bernard of Clairvaux and the Natural Realm'.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon XIII on the Song of Songs, as cited in Tuan, *The Hydrologic Cycle and the Wisdom of God*, p. 43.



The logic of intellectual patterns links us intimately to the internal structures of sense-making in a distinct intellectual *milieu*, and to the understanding of environment that it implies, be it cultural, religious, or quotidian. They are a glimpse, however brief, of the mechanics behind the magic of medieval thought. They simultaneously present a point of difference that must be crossed before interpretation occurs, and invite us to understand. Water serves to create a form of ecosophical template, a convergence of ideas pertaining to the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity.<sup>79</sup> It makes good on the invitation, and bridges the gap. As a result, water has wide-ranging transcultural and transhistorical significance that is as relevant to modern life as to historical analysis.

There was similitude in the structure of ideas and that of rivers for medieval thinkers, less than an isometric relationship, and yet far more than what we might call a metaphorical likeness. Rivers flowed to open places, secret places, distant places, and surprising places. They filled the world with life, with *vis naturae*, bridging the gap between hidden source and arid destination, bringing forth water from the hidden font of paradise. Their structure, although often enigmatic and convoluted, was the pattern by which life emerged, the shape of causation. Their image, once apprehended and imagined, produced a kind of *vis aestimativa*, an instinctive feeling brought on by the sensing of an image: this pattern, this form, *means* something.<sup>80</sup>

For we moderns, exercises in thinking through medieval fluid modes of thought are an attempt to recuperate something of the structural force that shaped medieval decision-making. To understand monastic motivations — agricultural, spiritual, architectural, political — we must understand the framework shaping metaphor. We must make ourselves intimately familiar with the fluid register of patterns — rivers, ponds, fonts, oceans — and their industrial element — fishing, agriculture, metalworking, garment-making, tanning, fishing — to understand the manner in which political decisions were shaped, and how monastic life was imagined. If, as Lakoff and Johnson have argued, metaphors define the parameters for behaviour to an extensive degree, then everyday monastic decisions can be better understood through extremely esoteric literature. This book may seem to be an exercise in extreme abstraction, and yet it is also an exercise in everyday monastic life. Things that happen in areas of intellectual history that may at first appear esoteric are more applicable than might initially be imagined.

<sup>79</sup> For the origins of the term ‘ecosophy’, see Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Pindar and Sutton, esp. p. 28.

<sup>80</sup> Carruthers, ‘Mechanisms for the Transmission of Culture’, p. 5.





Figure 4. 'British Library Manuscript Royal 12 F X, diagram of primary qualities and elements based on Aristotelian and Platonic theories (William of Conches, *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*)', London, British Library, MS Royal 12 F X, fol. 2r. Second half of thirteenth century. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

## THE MEDIEVAL PROPERTIES OF WATER METAPHOR

For monastic minds, the reading of the invisible world was a task of paramount importance. The ultimate aim of all monastic knowledge was the divine, and yet the divine could not be apprehended by direct observation. It could be deduced only by exegesis, both of Scripture and of the created world, and by revelation, be it didactically guided or divinely inspired through mystical contemplation or affective devotion. As a result, the monastic thinker was continually working in the space, the relationship, between the material and the abstract worlds. Abstractions varied in complexity within medieval thought, from a simple simile to a vast edifice of allegorical interconnectivity — hierarchies upon hierarchies, layers upon layers. The case studies to come reveal visual and textual constructs in which an intermingling of hydrological order and spiritual order is revealed. In these models, hydrology *is* spirituality, and spirituality *is* hydrological; the two are separate and yet causally linked. The binary of nature and culture is non-existent; they explain each other, for both stem from a single causative principle. It is no coincidence that Richard C. Hoffmann undertakes his discussion of medieval environmental history with an early chapter on ‘Humankind and God’s Creation in Medieval Minds’ — it is impossible to understand the former without the latter.<sup>1</sup>

And so it is with this book. In order to advance this notion, I will explore some of the key principles necessary for an understanding of the logic under which the

<sup>1</sup> Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, pp. 85–112.

claims in the above paragraph — that hydrology and spirituality are indivisible — operate. This analysis begins with a discussion of knowledge through Christ and Cosmos, the path of epistemology that water is able to delineate through flow. The conditions of knowledge, the role of Christology, and the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm all combine to create a complex set of conditions for the mapping and realization of knowledge, and explain the niche occupied by water in the medieval metaphorical framework. The chapter continues with a discussion of water as one of the four elements, a primordial matter possessed of simple qualities from which all composites are derived. By placing water within a schema of material commonality, it is possible to understand the facility with which aqueous traits fit within a broader expression of esoteric fluid notions.

### *Fluid Knowledge through Christ and Cosmos*

The need to understand one's context in a wider story is perhaps one of the most fundamental requirements of thought. Nowhere is this more apparent than medieval thought, riddled as it is with genealogies, syzygies, diagrams, schemata, and lists. In order to make sense of the need for a linking structure and narrative for the components found within medieval thought, I must first explore some of the key properties of this story. Within the context of this book, part of the power of water as an abstraction and a metaphor stems from its function as a framework through which to form a microcosm of wider order, a hydrological rendering of the cosmos around diverse focus points of Christian salvation history. The provenance and patterns of reality and the causation of knowledge followed a hydrological pattern because this pattern served to guide the path between principles that enabled a contextual understanding of a larger order. Furthermore, it elucidated the steps of learning and of action required to negotiate such a context.

In *Creation of the Sacred*, Walter Burkert postulated that all of the tools available to the human intellect have long been directed to a single end: they work towards the expansion of imaginative worlds, augmenting both their scope and their diversity.<sup>2</sup> When human minds are exposed to the multiform complexity of the sensible world, wrote Burkert, 'they are subject to a plethora of sense-impressions that stream from a vastly complicated universe'.<sup>3</sup> Without context, it is not possible to

<sup>2</sup> Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred*, p. 161.

correlate the contents of the mind and extrapolate the patterns and hierarchies inherent in the ordering of the intellectual world. Simply put, knowledge requires a template, a pattern, to make sense of vast and incomprehensible complexity. Human beings need a pattern to ascertain what should be known, what should not be known, why some things cannot be known in part or in full, and how these diverse paths of learning fit together. It also requires phenomenal input, images to map these patterns on to.

The nature, possibility, and provenance of knowledge define the terms of its pursuit, and exist at the heart of any theory pertaining to knowledge. For the Middle Ages, the provenance of knowledge was possessed of traits that were distinctly fluvial, rendering the division of ideas from the primary causes as flowing forth from a lofty fountain. The course of knowing, like the course of water, followed a type of 'gravity'. By parsing the categories of knowable things, by delineating the relationship between cause and effect, and by forming an image by which the unknowable could be intuited, water gave shape to epistemology. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes that a religious epistemology resolves questions of knowledge (what is knowable, how, and why) by 'allowing certain metaphors and images to shape one's actions and perception of reality'.<sup>4</sup> Although vertical in nature, the celestial hierarchy was not a single continuum, but a series of separate hierarchies combined to form the ordered construct of Creation. They functioned differently depending on the hierarchy in which they participated: the celestial hierarchy and the mundane hierarchy, although linked, existed as distinct entities with their own rules and dynamics. The chain of being, the emanation of the source, streams of knowledge divided into the liberal arts: this book is replete with epistemic mappings based on the systems theory of water. By rendering this liquefied and manifold causal chain as an intellectual entity, it was possible to address questions of Christian motivation, individual morality, interconnectivity, and teleology on a day-to-day basis, but also to apprehend something of the vast context within which such strivings took place. The continuum allowed many opportunities for subtlety and playfulness despite its vertical span, for as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen proposes, 'nature does not love a ladder, nor any of the tidy forms humans build to arrange their cosmologies. The Chain of Being is full of kinks'.<sup>5</sup> Water, both in its rigid adherence to the laws of physics and fluid dynamics and the flexibility of its meanderings and arrangements, was a perfect avatar of this ordered disorder.

<sup>4</sup> Wolterstorff, 'Epistemology of Religion', p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, 'The Sea Above', p. 107. Cohen refers to J. Allan Mitchell's key study of medieval ontological entanglement in *Becoming Human*.

It was within the essence of the Trinity, the ultimate source and concentration of reality, that all thought within a medieval world found its ultimate consummation, and yet the paths of apprehension were manifold and winding. For the medieval mind, the process of knowing was a many-faceted religious endeavour, a quest to overcome the deficiencies of the human intellect in order to feel the presence of God within thought itself. In the words of Hugh of Saint-Victor, the mind must seek 'that wisdom which is the sole primordial ideal or pattern of things'.<sup>6</sup> Within the journey towards the realization of this sole truth, we find the original principle of knowledge: God was the source of knowledge and its ultimate principle, and thus defined and guaranteed knowledge in equal measure. Through religious experience, the medieval mind experienced the profundity of Creation as *created*, marvelling in the minuteness of some facets, wondering at the immensity of others, while delighting in the intricacies of others.<sup>7</sup> Hugh also proposed that wisdom should govern all human actions and pursuits, for only through the contemplation of truth and the practice of virtue could humanity restore itself to the image of God.<sup>8</sup> The paths by which the Good could be apprehended, however, were winding and meandering, not straight and true royal highways.

The Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus taught that through emanation (the word meaning literally to flow out, from the Latin *emanatio*), the essence of the One created the world through a series of existential realizations.<sup>9</sup> This principle, received and adapted within the Christian tradition, came to represent the outpouring of divine essence and causation from a triune source. Emanation never ceased, the whole process moving continuously outward from God. The seminal Christian Platonist philosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius demonstrates an emerging Christian notion of *emanatio*: the *Celestial Hierarchy* presents a description of divine emanation at the very beginning of the text:

Every divine procession of radiance from the Father, while constantly bounteously flowing to us, fills us anew as though with a unifying power, by recalling us to

<sup>6</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, I.IV, as cited in Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Wolterstorff, 'Epistemology of Religion', p. 303.

<sup>8</sup> Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 181.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Plotinus never used the term 'emanation' in his writings. The theory of emanation represented the results of later Neoplatonist interpretations of his ideas. The principle worked as follows: the events of Genesis took place as a result of the essence of God *radiating* outwards, creating the heavens and the earth as it went.

things above, and leading us to the unity of the Shepherding Father and to the Divine One.<sup>10</sup>

The non-specific One of Plotinus has transformed through Christianization into the One that is Three of the Trinity, albeit not yet distinct in its articulation of this principle. The Creator spilled out in endless abundance, a never ceasing flow of meaning from the highest apex down to the borders of non-being. His eternal wellspring was not simply a passive phenomenon, for it actively sought to pull those who felt its touch back to its source. The source exerted a magnetism that drew like to like, tugging at the spiritual faculties of the human mind. The One, in this formulation, 'becomes manyness and proceeds into manifestation for the uplifting of those creatures governed by Its providence', yet 'abides eternally within Itself in changeless sameness [...] and elevates to Itself, according to their capacity, those who turn towards It'.<sup>11</sup> Dionysius claimed, furthermore, that 'hierarchy, to me, is sacred order, knowledge, and activity assimilating itself, as far as it can, to the likeness of God, and raising itself to its utmost, by means of the illuminations granted by God, to the likeness of God'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, hierarchy and the flow of emanation became fundamentally linked at a metaphysical level for Christian Platonists, a principle still very much alive within the intellectual culture of the High Middle Ages.

The upwards gaze of Christian epistemology was an attempt to reconcile the perfection of the heavens with the imperfection of the world that surrounded one's daily life. In order to do so, the mind traversed a vertically ascendant hierarchy, a continuum of existence extending from the highest of celestial principles through a multi-faceted and strictly hierarchical cosmic order down to the mind of the human being. Within the Neoplatonic tradition, the human 'all-soul' had three phases: the intellective soul, the reasoning soul, and the unreasoning soul. The first was purely extant within the realm of spirit and contemplated the Divine Intellect alone, the second bridged the gap between body and soul through discursive reasoning, and the third was wholly a thing of the body, controlling the faculties of sense, imagination, and sense memory.<sup>13</sup>

Within this hierarchy existed a continuum of knowledge: the purest form of knowledge existed in a state of *propinquitās*, or nearness, to God: it was the

<sup>10</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Celestial Hierarchy', trans. by Luibhéid, i.145.

<sup>11</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Celestial Hierarchy', trans. by Luibhéid, i.149.

<sup>12</sup> Luscombe, 'Hierarchy', p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, pp. 64–65.

*cognitio matutina*, or ‘morning knowledge’, existing in its clearest form. As knowledge descended through the celestial hierarchy, it was occluded by the disharmonious nature of the world it interacted with, becoming *cognitio vespertina*, or ‘evening knowledge’. As knowledge emanated from the One, it gradually became less divine, progressing (as all things within the world must) through a life cycle from birth, through life, and to death. According to Plotinus, the soul — by virtue of proximity to divinity — was more closely modelled upon the ideas of the Divine Intellect.<sup>14</sup> In its natural state, the soul existed in a state of perpetual contemplation of, or communion with, the intellect of God. The body, however, exerted a strong downwards pull on the spirit, tugging the gaze of humanity into time and into memory. At the outer limit of knowledge, true understanding became almost impossible: within the sinful world, the emanations faded to nothing, dissipating like the ripples from a stone dropped in water. It was here, at the sunset of knowledge, that the ripples of divine emanation ended.<sup>15</sup>

What had, according to Christian Platonism, started in the Divine Intellect and radiated ever outwards reached its final end at the very point where the limited intellect of humanity was able to perceive it. Thus was the problem of medieval epistemology keenly felt: within the chaos of the world, the true nature of things was felt as the faintest of touches, intuitively perceived but dimly understood. In the ninth-century *Periphyseon*, John Scottus Eriugena described the descent of knowledge in strongly Platonic terms, as a river of intellect emanating from the heavens and flowing into the world:

The whole river first flows from its source, and through its channel the water which first wells up in the source continues to flow always without any break to whatever distance it extends. So the Divine Goodness and Essence [...] first flow down into the primordial causes [...] flowing forth continuously through the higher to the lower; and return back again to their source.<sup>16</sup>

Not only was the greater world pouring itself onto the lesser realms below, but through the saving doctrine of Christianity, the waters miraculously returned to the heavens whence they came, uniting the enriched spirits of the faithful with

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> An appropriate term, for in Latin, the West of the world was the *Occident*, from the Latin *occidere* or to fall. As with many Latin words, this word has telling etymological depth. *Occidere* not only means to fall, but also to decline or to end.

<sup>16</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, III. 632 B–C, as cited in Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, p. 37.



their fountainhead.<sup>17</sup> In order for the intellect to traverse the shifting ambiguities of existence, the whole of Creation was imagined within an all-encompassing cosmic order. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus claimed that the physical world was a 'second cosmos' that 'at every point copies the archetype: it has life and being in copy [...] In its character of image it holds, too, that divine perpetuity'.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on the Platonic tradition of *eidos* (εἶδος), or form, the Christian epistemological tradition grew and changed over time, taking shape through a series of reforms, doctrinal changes, and re-evaluations.

The necessity of a medieval Christian epistemology stemmed from the grand Creation narrative of humanity laid out within the pages of Scripture. It was a tale that carried within it the greatest failing of humanity, while simultaneously offering hope of its greatest triumph, the reversal of its flaws. The Fall from and recuperation of knowledge existed at the very heart of medieval Christianity, motivating many of its spiritual strivings and framing its quest for knowledge. The dynamics of epistemology guided the Christian mind in its quest to know what was knowable, shun what was undesirable, and endure what must be endured to reach a spiritual destination in heaven.

To undertake this search required instruction, for only through guidance could one remain on the path and act in a fashion conducive to knowledge: although Christian spirituality had a strong intuitive element, there was also an equally strong need for a pedagogical and didactic tradition within its epistemology. In his *Didascalicon*, Hugh of Saint-Victor explains knowledge as struggle; it is the ability to follow a path by accepting the good and rejecting the bad:

The man who seeks knowledge of the virtues and a way of life from the Sacred Word ought to study especially those books which urge contempt for this world and inflame the mind with love for its creator; which teach the straight road of life and show how virtues may be acquired and vices turned aside. [...] Do you desire to reach your goal? Then learn how a man reaches the goal you are after.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This motif bears a strong resemblance to the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, after which the river reversed its flow, returning from whence it came. The motif is a powerful one: the saving grace resulting from Christ's ministry on earth (initiated with his baptism) had the power to transcend natural laws, to reverse the ordinary dynamics of knowledge. See Smith, 'Caring for the Body and Soul with Water' on the sermons of Guerric of Igny, which structure their imagery on this motif.

<sup>18</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, v.viii.12, as cited in Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*, pp. 135–36.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, v.7, p. 128.



In *The Mirror of Language*, Marcia Colish proposes that the New Covenant carried with it a duty to teach, a professional responsibility inherited by the learned Christian. The goal, according to Colish, was not simply to attain knowledge of God, but to teach the Word of God to others.<sup>20</sup> The interpretation of sacred Scripture, according to Hugh of Saint-Victor, 'either instructs the mind with knowledge or it equips it with morals. It teaches us what it delights us to know and what it behooves us to imitate'.<sup>21</sup> The goal was clear, yet the path to its realization was obscured by the veil of ignorance, placed in a remote location by the spiritual gulf that separated humanity from the celestial realm.

Just as a river was, to medieval thinkers, 'directed' *to* its source by providence and yet also *from* its source by its flow, so too were the emanating ideas of the divine thought to flow *from* and simultaneously point *to* their divine source. Within this dynamic, the river acts as the conduit through which the human mind attempts a communion with divinity. This strong correlation was noticed and exploited by medieval exegetes for the purposes of exposition. In his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scottus Eriugena elaborated on the liberal arts using aqueous symbolism:

Just as many waters come together and flow down into the bed of one river from different fountainheads, so do the natural and liberal disciplines coalesce to form one, same meaning of inward contemplation, which is the highest fountainhead of all wisdom, that is to say Christ, insinuated into every quarter through the different speculations of theology.<sup>22</sup>

By the thirteenth century, the conflation of river imagery and the abstract dimensions of knowledge appeared in a mature form.<sup>23</sup> In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas describes the providence of divine knowledge as an aqueduct, for Christ was an engineer fruitfully and artificially dividing his infinite bounty (and through him, that of the whole Trinity) into diverse channels of spiritual meaning:

<sup>20</sup> Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, v.vi, as cited in Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Expositiones in hierarchiam coelestem*, as cited in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that the proliferation of Aristotelian ideas by this time complicates the picture. This passage and other like it, however, fall very much inside a Christian Platonist frame.

Fruit is designated from where it is said *like an aqueduct*: for just as many aqueducts divided are produced from one source to make fertile the earth, so from Christ flowed forth the kinds of diverse graces to plant the Church, as it said in Ephesians 4, 11: *He gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, others evangelists, others shepherds and teachers, for the completeness of the saints in the work of ministry, for building the body of Christ.*<sup>24</sup>

Aquinas' turn of phrase draws on a precedent within medieval thought that played on the resemblance between the branching tributaries of a river and knowledge in motion as a broadly applicable trope. Not only was the greater world pouring itself onto the lesser realms below, but through the saving doctrine of Christianity, the waters miraculously returned to the heavens from whence they came, uniting the enriched spirits of the faithful with their fountainhead.<sup>25</sup> In order for the intellect to traverse the shifting ambiguities of existence, the whole of Creation was imagined within an all-encompassing cosmic order. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus had claimed that the physical world was a 'second cosmos' that 'at every point copies the archetype: it has life and being in copy [...] In its character of image it holds, too, that divine perpetuity'.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, it is important to discuss the role of gender in this intellectual model. Although Christ is rendered by Aquinas as the source and spiritual medium of knowledge, it was commonly Mary that was the structure, the aqueduct itself, that mediated his flow. If we return to Urry, the Virgin served as a scape mapped onto the flows of Creation. As Catherine M. Mooney has discussed, it was the *Sermo de aqueductu* of Bernard of Clairvaux that set a model for Mary as the mediator of graces as well as the mother of God, the more accessible medium through which the intimidating divinity of Christ could be accessed. This model was replicated in saintly *vitae*, 'in which women, much more than men, are viewed as mediators, channels, or bridges connecting this world to the supernatural world'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, there was often a gender dynamic of power in play in the visualization of

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard', trans. by Bugnolo. Italics in original.

<sup>25</sup> This motif bears a strong resemblance to the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, after which the river reversed its flow, returning from whence it came. The motif is a powerful one: the saving grace resulting from Christ's ministry on earth (initiated with his baptism) had the power to transcend natural laws, to reverse the ordinary dynamics of knowledge.

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, v.viii.12, as cited in Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory*, pp. 135–36.

<sup>27</sup> Mooney, 'Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae? Clare of Assisi and her Interpreters', p. 69.

knowledge, with masculine powers at the source, and with feminine powers serving as the medium by which these powers entered the temporal world. Male and female exercises of power over water differed in application and authority, but were both parallel facets of medieval spiritual hydro-politics.<sup>28</sup>

The river system and the metaphysical continuum of high medieval thought made comfortable companions. The relationship of the lofty heights of divinity and the lonely realms of lesser beings corresponded with the gravity that powers the flow of water. The evaporation of water that completes the cycle is an image for transcendence, the breaking of earthly shackles, a Jacob's ladder for the soul. The varied terrain of spiritual life's long and multifurcated river recalls the complexities of moral life, the forces at play in the pilgrimage of life from birth to death, from prelapsarian sin to purification. The interrelationship of hydrology and metaphysics can be clearly apprehended in the description of the twelfth-century cosmos by Marie-Dominique Chenu:

The universe, then, is an admirably ordered unity [...] The integration — at once ontological and noetic — of all the beings it contains in its hierarchical order implies a 'continuity' that is at once dynamic and static in principle. Between each of these beings in their separate ranks exists an intimate bond: the greater intensity of the superior being exerts an attractive force upon the one next below it and draws it upward toward its own higher level; and out of this attraction arises the fulfilment of the lower being, or, if it is a spiritual being, its happiness. We are far from a discontinuous universe in which each being possesses its dynamism and intelligibility wholly and only within itself.<sup>29</sup>

Water, like the continuum suggested by Chenu, provides a differentiated and yet uninterrupted movement of essence from an abundant source — the self-generative spring of Plotinian thought — that is both dynamic and static in principle. The paradox of dynamism and stasis, so difficult to grasp, finds eloquent expression within a hydrology. A watershed is dynamic by nature, ever in motion and ever pulsing with the vital force of fluid. A watershed is also a stable system, at least to the limited perception of humanity. Although the course of a river system and the contours of the coast are constantly in motion within the grand temporality

<sup>28</sup> This study deals with the masculine register of hydro-politics by virtue of its male monastic subject matter. For an insight into women's religious devotion and water, see Hetta Howes's 2016 PhD thesis at Queen Mary, University of London, 'In Search of Clearer Water'. For my work on this topic, see Smith, 'Philosophia divitur'. The two registers should be seen as two sides of a shared system.

<sup>29</sup> Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, p. 24.

of nature, it appears to offer a stable conduit through which the dynamic motion of water may be mediated. Each component of a river system is indeed intimately bonded, the outpouring essence of its source exerting a powerful pull to reciprocity. It is within this Platonic fusion of river and metaphysical continuum that the primary source material of this book appears, intrinsically whole and yet possessed of manifold hierarchical components.

The means and the end of religious thought was this single, crucial goal, a goal that was undertaken within the soul of each and every Christian. Saint Augustine tells us, 'although it is our homeland, [salvation] has also made itself the road to our homeland'.<sup>30</sup> The goal was also the missing ingredient necessary to realise the goal: the journey mirrored the destination. The journey to into knowledge was that of a traveller on a long and winding road who, while facing much hardship and privation, would return to the lost homeland by the grace of God. The apprehension of abstraction through the structural logic of environment acted as a form of signposting on the road to knowledge.

The natural world was not only a means to knowledge by virtue of its resemblance to God through similarity, but a series of guided signs set out by the Trinity, actively seeking to impart wisdom through the compulsion of the Holy Spirit. In the *Didascalicon* and the *Institutio novitiorum*, Hugh of Saint-Victor described the *materialis manuductio*, identified by Ineke van't Spijker as a 'guiding by visible, material signs', and described as follows:

Materially taking by hand (*manuductio*) is to be understood as 'the corporeal signs, which the human mind uses as a *manuductio*, that it is directed by the visible to the imitation and contemplation of the invisible. To imitation by the practice of virtue, to contemplation by knowledge of truth'.<sup>31</sup>

Natural imagery conforms to invisible realities for two reasons, taking the mind by the hand and leading it onward. First, it was God who created nature, and thus all realities in higher realms resemble mundane images through a common creator. Secondly, the incarnation of God in Christ — the archetypal act of image-making — renders that which is invisible and unknowable familiar through a divine act of conformation. This made the interpretation of abstract imagery all the more significant, for it was a salvific act, and thus a process of spiritual edification of itself, regardless of the message communicated:

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.XI.II, trans. by Green, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Commentaria in hierarchiam coelestem*, as cited in van't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, p. 83.

Corresponding to the beauty of the visible things is their function as signs of the invisible. Ultimately this is the result of how God conforms himself to man, in the double *conditio* and *dispositio* of the visible, a conformation which has its apogee in the incarnation: 'He has conformed himself to what is ours, so that by what is ours he would become known to us'.<sup>32</sup>

For the Middle Ages, the association between knowledge and perfection was compelling, and yet the human race found itself in an imperfect state in which knowledge was difficult, veiled, and imperfect, at best. Attempts to address questions of knowledge were often fraught with complexities — some of which were a failing of humanity, some of which derived from the post-lapsarian darkening of the natural world — that prompted many centuries of elaborate debate. The philosophers of the classical world, with Plato and Aristotle in prominent display, became epistemological guides who mapped out new and increasingly elaborate quests for human knowledge. Within ever-changing yet religiously unified systems, the desire to seek wisdom required the knower to ask a series of increasingly problematic questions.

Within the grand narrative of human history as imagined within medieval thought and internalised by the monastics of Europe, water flowed throughout time, space, and the ontological essence of humanity.<sup>33</sup> The spring of paradise, once hidden, flowed with the life-giving force of Christ, becoming the manifold rivers of the Gospel, preached at all corners of the earth. Carried by its swift and majestic flow of salvific momentum and guided by the conduit of the Church, the faithful would be carried to that final and universal headwater, teeming with life eternal. In his second homily on the *Song of Songs*, Gregory of Nyssa reflects upon Christ's crucifixion as font of salvation. Gregory was particular interested in the passage in which the bride expresses a desire to the groom — interpreted by medieval exegetes as Christ — to drink from the fountain of his lips: 'And running to you, the fountain, I will drink from the divine stream which you cause to spring up for those thirsting after you. Water pours out from your side and the spear has opened that vein'.<sup>34</sup> Referring to the mixed water and blood that poured from the side of Christ

<sup>32</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Commentaria in hierarchiam coelestem*, as cited in van't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> Although this chapter deals primarily with Christology, the three case study chapters to come offer further expansion of Christ's typological symbolism into other areas of medieval thought.

<sup>34</sup> Laird, 'The Fountain of his Lips', p. 43.

at the crucifixion (John 19. 34), Christ becomes a fountainhead of salvific water.<sup>35</sup> There is no quenching of this thirst, for the drinker in turn becomes the fountain 'springing up into life everlasting' (John 4. 14).

The 'seal of flesh' was pressed upon Christ as upon a letter, hiding his divine bounty behind a veil of outward physicality. Only through the spring of Mother Church could the fountain be unsealed, and the divine bounty hidden beneath be unleashed.<sup>36</sup> This theme is continued by Bernard of Clairvaux in his letters, where he frequently makes use of biblical and Christological allegory to illustrate his arguments:

Let him who has ears to hear, hear him crying out in the Temple: 'Whoever thirsts, let him come and drink', and: 'Come unto me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you'. Are you afraid that you will break down where Truth himself has promised to refresh you? Certainly if the 'dark waters from the clouds of the air' please you so much, you will be more than delighted with the clear water that springs from the fountains of the Saviour.<sup>37</sup>

By referring to the fountain typology of Christ's crucifixion and the corresponding fountain of theology it enabled, Gregory tapped into the intellectual core of Christian salvific imagination. In his own twelfth-century sermons on the *Song of Songs*, Bernard made use of skilled mystical exegesis to paint a picture of Christ as a saving fountain: 'He is the fountain of life, a sealed fountain, brimming over from within the enclosed garden through the pipe of St Paul's mouth'.<sup>38</sup> True wisdom, 'drawn out of secret places', is a particularly powerful image for students of the monastic tradition. When writing these words, it is not difficult to imagine that Bernard may have been imagining the bountiful waters of his monasteries, piped and channelled for the edification of men.<sup>39</sup> In his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, Bernard makes frequent use of the symbolism of water for the typology of Christ, comparing him

<sup>35</sup> In the *commixtio*, or the mingling of water and wine, it is the water that represents Christ's humility and humanity, whereas the blood or wine represents His divinity. Thus, by pouring forth a torrent of water, the figure of Christ, the greatest exemplar of the Supreme Good discussed by Boethius of Dacia, renders salvation as a flood of human essence from the perfect human being to all lesser human beings, nourishing the human race and saving them through his abundant and shared essence.

<sup>36</sup> *The Song of Songs*, ed. and trans. by Norris, p. 184.

<sup>37</sup> Letter 107, in *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Scott James, p. 155.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 22. 4, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. by Walsh, I. pp. 16–17.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 22. 4, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. by Walsh, I. pp. 16–17.

to a river, a fountain, and the ocean.<sup>40</sup> In *The Hydrologic Cycle and the Wisdom of God*, Yi-Fu Tuan wrote that 'Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs are richly metaphorical. Parts of the water cycle appear again and again to illustrate relationships in the spiritual realm'.<sup>41</sup>

Only through the understanding of good (*bonum*) behind the material could one come to wisdom (*sapientia*), symbolised in the Augustinian tradition in the second person of the Trinity, Christ the Son.<sup>42</sup> In the words of Hugh of Saint-Victor, 'He is the Form, He is the Medicine, He is the Example, He is your remedy'.<sup>43</sup> God became man and bridged the links in the chain between humanity and God, allowing for the possibility of knowledge. Without Christ, the human mind languished near the lower extreme of a very long and ascending continuum, from which there was no escape; the darkness of a world without knowledge was its fate. Through Christ, the mind could be enriched, the thirst for knowledge quenched, the cup of the mind filled to overflowing.

The coming of Christ and the introduction of grace into the world caused the barrier blocking the fountain to burst, allowing the rivers of salvation to flow into the world once more. If the body of Mary formed the scape by which the Son flowed into the world and became flesh, it was his own body that formed a new artifice by which knowledge was distributed across the corners of Earth. When this is considered, the medieval obsession with hydraulics in the context of spirituality is more comprehensible — it is a replication of archetypal scapes to mediate and channel flows set in motion by Christ. For a monastic, who sought to emulate Christ in all things, what could be more fitting? The soteriological pattern of Christ's very existence was a wondrous irrigation. In the words of Bruno of Segni, with the waters came the riches of spiritual understanding:

Just as the breath of the Lord releases the teeming waters, opening up the closed garden and unsealing the blocked up fountain, so does the Spirit that breathes at the coming of the incarnate Word open up the garden of Scripture, causing floods of spiritual understanding to gush forth from its fountains.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Bernard and other exegetes also appropriate or blur feminine imagery and map it into the masculine realm. For more, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* and Eng, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's 'Sermons on the Song of Songs'*.

<sup>41</sup> Tuan, *The Hydrologic Cycle and the Wisdom of God*, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Bruno of Segni is originally quoted as follows: 'You have cleft open springs and brooks. Springs and Brooks are understood to be the books of law and the prophets and both



Finally, in the apocalyptic vision in Revelation, Christ the lamb proclaims ‘Behold, I make all things new’. In the New Jerusalem, beyond time, suffering and death, Christ will ‘give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely’.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, a ‘pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal’, flows through the heavenly Jerusalem, causing the tree of life to bloom on either side.<sup>46</sup> Through this strong scriptural association, the symbolism of the river came to signify the providence of divine knowledge in the form of an entity within the intellectual and material landscape. When Christ was baptised in the Jordan, he gave all of the waters the power to baptise.<sup>47</sup> When Christ was crucified and blood flowed from his wounds, he unlocked the potential for all to access the source.

Fluid knowledge through Christ and cosmos occurred through the mediating channels of intellectual inquiry and spiritual intuition. In the case of the cosmos, an understanding of natural philosophy was a key skill for the discoverer of knowledge. In the section to follow, I explore the material qualities of thought when rendered in the likeness of an element. Through the shared structure of Creation and salvation history, the diverse perishable forms of the temporal world were linked. Through the shared elemental tetrad of earth, air, fire, and water, the primordial traits of matter were replicated in many forms, speaking of a fundamental causative and structural pattern within the arrangement of Creation that was replicated within the structure of thought-craft.

The medieval thinker wielded great power when making metaphorical links that associated everyday experiences of water and patterns familiar to all with a vast hierarchy of divine knowledge. By wielding a version of Christ’s irrigative powers — imbuing water with meaning through baptism, changing the nature of the waters through crucifixion, shaping and controlling the flows of knowledge through doctrine — the *rhetor* could attain something of the epistemic power of Christ, a kind of religious authority tied to the fundamental tropes and patterns of Christianity. It was a vocabulary of influence and reshaping that tapped into a deep wellspring of nutritive force, vitality, and causative energy.

testaments. These springs were closed and stopped up. But the Lord opened up their water courses, and broke open the tight-fitting fetters that bound them, and bade an abundance of waters to flow from them’. As cited in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1, pp. 257, 450 (endnotes for p. 257).

<sup>45</sup> Revelation 21. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 22. 1–2.

<sup>47</sup> For more on this topic, see Smith, ‘Caring for the Body and Soul with Water’.



### *The Likeness of an Element*

In the case of John of Genoa's forcefully riparian sentence discussed earlier, the commonality of riverine and grammatical interconnectivity was more than explanatory. It was the bridge between categories of temporal existence that, despite their seemingly disparate nature, could be traced back to the primordial source of things by shared pathways. Similarity can easily be overemphasised, but it was the causation of similarity that gave meaning to likeness for medieval thinkers. Caroline Walker Bynum points to the classical trope of 'like from like' prevalent within medieval thinking. As she describes it, 'like is generated from like, like returns to like, like knows like via likeness'.<sup>48</sup> Speculation upon these links was, in the words of Robert Javelet, a vision of the truth navigated 'by the mediation of likenesses'.<sup>49</sup> Dale Coulter describes the hermeneutic effects of these likenesses upon the arts of memory and composition as an escalating process of meditation upon the links from the visible to the invisible:

The inner structure of the human mind is such that it can receive the 'forms' of all created things. This happens as images or forms are impressed upon the memory, which serve as their organizing center. The mental image is itself a reflection of the created object. As such the mind can begin to meditate upon it and to investigate its various features. Investigation of individual features prepares the mind to extract analogies that serve as windows into other realities.<sup>50</sup>

Similitudes whisper to each other across the gulf of seemingly incomprehensible categories, reminding us that we are not looking at many things, but the many faces of one thing. Like, in the act of coming into being, generates its similitudes; it causes like things to be and shapes their form. The essence of knowledge blurs different forms of knowing, different modes of knowing, and different things to be known into a single principle, a material flow from origin to destination, an endless outpouring of divine sentence across Creation, ultimate cause of all possible ends. Thus, likeness has a generative and causative quality. Like speaks to that which it is like through its likeness, and the evocation of metaphor is not merely peripheral and illustrative as a result. It is a hermeneutic process delving into the heart of spiritual truth through the exploration of similitudes, the painting of a theological picture. Likeness was fundamental and intrinsic to the reality, in the Platonic sense,

<sup>48</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> As cited and translated in Coulter, 'Contemplation as "Speculation"', p. 205.

<sup>50</sup> Coulter, 'Contemplation as "Speculation"', p. 224.

of the thing, the reason for its form and qualities. Like all medieval correlations, signification through similarity was far more than a mechanism of meaning.

Through the dance of the elements, the *rhetor* gained a tool both reliable in its adherence to certain rules, and endlessly flexible in its emulation of elemental interplay. In the likeness of something sensible, medieval intellection and imagination could conceive of a 'concept of the soul' that mirrored nature. Intellectual entities were *like* natural entities and *behaved* like them because they were all alike in common with God in the causative sense. They corresponded through their shared resemblance to their Creator, for like knows like through likeness. Moreover, the Creator was held to have created a world in which the structural reality of things was intelligible in their likeness. The fourteenth-century Carmelite John of Hildesheim explicitly conflated the source of life (literally the *fons vitae*), the causation of all things and their position in the divine hierarchy, and the vital essence of Creation. To his mind and that of many others, this was not an *ad hoc* application of metaphor for the purposes of exposition, but a common path to a single truth. Spreading forth from the Trinity, the essence of life derives from the 'innate fecund perfection of the living source':

*The multiple abundance of the Living Source*

11. *From this primitive source of all life, which is to the highest degree living, issued in the beginning the external heavens, that is, the entire universe with all angelic and intelligent life.*

12. *The Life Source which produced this first outflow poured life into beings through the outpouring of itself. So the outpouring must continue, for if it were checked for an instant all created life would cease to exist.*

13. *Every intelligent living being which flows immediately from the first one remains so inexhaustibly and continuously alive that, according to the law established by the first one, at no moment could it of itself cease or interrupt its being.*

14. *Such is the integrity, unity, and indivisibility of every living thing that no being can properly be said to be half alive.*<sup>51</sup>

Thus it is through the holistic imagery of water that like flows into like, and the chain of being flows from its uncreated source into all causes. It is within the elemental traits of medieval thought that we gain an insight into the powers peculiar to water as a narrative of thought. Gaston Bachelard ascribed to water the gift of

<sup>51</sup> John of Hildesheim, 'The Mirror of the Source of Life', trans. by Schaer, II.

*binding together*; it was the glue of matter, for water tempers the other elements, making them malleable.<sup>52</sup> This was true of medieval thought in a manner peculiar to medieval thought: water was the adhesive of cosmological order on every level, be it elemental and primary, substantial and composite, or abstract and of the mind. This idea made sense to medieval thinkers, for the material traits of water created the flexible intermediation required to bind substance together. Indeed, the commonality of a hydrology and a sentence were not a large stretch of the imagination; they were common derivatives of a shared source.

The ecumenical properties of water extend comfortably into the mystical and affective realm; they are derived from the ability to unite disparate locales within a landscape. Just as ideas pass from God to human minds through the mediating hierarchy of Creation, so too did acts of grace span this gap with lightning clarity. A fitting *exemplum* appears in the *vita* of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, the creation of the thirteenth-century Cistercian Goswin of Bossut. In her early life, we are told that Ida has performed many good works, but that ‘*God had not yet rained* any shower of tears *on the soil* of her heart (Gen. 2.5).’<sup>53</sup> The Lord, ‘not to delay such saving shows any longer’, engenders the growth of her spirit through divine rain:

Suddenly and unexpectedly *the floodgates* of Ida’s eyes and head *burst open* (Gen 7.11) and out poured such a flood of tears that scarce could she hold back their onrush [...] Such was her first visitation. In it the Lord moistened the dryness of her heart with an outpouring as abundant as it was mild, an *irrigation* at once *from below and from on high* (Josh. 15.19). Such progress and growth did this bring her that from that day on her mind was deservedly called the *fountain of never-failing waters* (Isa. 58.11).<sup>54</sup>

This pouring out of spiritual revelation is an influx of knowledge in equal measure. It will be discussed within this book at greater length in the chapters to come, for it is a core characteristic of the abstractions in this study. ‘Knowledge’, as defined for the purposes of this study, is not confined to intellection alone, but to the immanence of mystical revelation. In addition, this is an example of Mooney’s characterization of the mediating function of women’s spiritual engagement with water discussed above, and an example of gendered power over water demonstrated in context.

<sup>52</sup> McAllester Jones, *Gaston Bachelard, Subversive Humanist*, pp. 102–03.

<sup>53</sup> Goswin of Bossut, ‘The Life of Ida of Nivelles’, trans. by Cawley, p. 33. For a detailed study of water and women’s affective devotion, see Howes, ‘In Search of Clearer Water’. See also her blog post ‘Watery Offerings’.

<sup>54</sup> Goswin of Bossut, ‘The Life of Ida of Nivelles’, trans. by Cawley, p. 33.

As an idea, 'water' was primary and thus a set of qualities rather than an actual substantial entity: the same is true of intellection. David Macauley has proposed that water is defined by the *via negativa*, by what it is not. Water, he claims, 'is typically colorless, tasteless, and odorless. It lacks form but becomes a matrix of form for other things, providing shape, contour, and texture to the landscape as well as more discrete objects'.<sup>55</sup> To my mind, one could just as easily say the same of thought, a flexible and yet intangible medium for ideas. For the medieval thinkers I am discussing, both thought and water were ideas of form, and were meaningful not only through their inherent properties, but through the manner of their transmission: water carried life; thought carried ideas. Through the medieval rules of similitude, water's resemblance to the processes of thought reflected true reality, and created images within the mind, concepts of the spirit attached to structures of inner life. Through participation in composites, be they systems within the mind or material entities within the world without, water and its traits embodied and represented a principle of fluidity in medieval thought.

These systems and entities correspond to the Augustinian notion of *verba mentis* (words of the mind) as opposed to those upon the lips, abstractions of speech. They also span the two categories of signification identified by Peter Abelard: linguistic signs and the signification of things. Things signify other things when perception of one can enable cognition of the other.<sup>56</sup> The semiotic link between word and thing is strong within the *Catholicon*. John of Genoa's fusion of sentence and river system has the effect of merging words and things to create a network of *verba mentis* bonded to the qualities of things within the natural world. Not only are they a non-verbal language of the mind, but they are also a *sentence of the mind*. Like a sentence analysed for its semiotic meaning, they have both paradigmatic meaning and ever variable *syntagmata* that, when altered, engender new messages.

The systematization of conceptual ecologies — networks of ideas modelled upon networks of natural entities — introduces a powerful insight into the organizational techniques of thought practised in the High Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas wrote that 'whenever the intellect actually regards anything there must be at the same time be formed in us a phantasm, that is, *a likeness of something sensible*'.<sup>57</sup> Within the intellectual discourse of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, the characteristic interconnectivity of hydrological systems and their dynamic

<sup>55</sup> Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> Meier-Oeser, 'Medieval Semiotics'.

<sup>57</sup> Minnis, 'Medieval Imagination and Memory', p. 240. My italics.

interrelation were mirrored by intangible *phantasmata*.<sup>58</sup> By mapping the invisible world of interrelated concepts onto something familiar — something sensible such as a river — the mind leapt a conceptual chasm from extreme abstraction to tangible materiality. By not only visualizing but systematizing, this image could then come into its own as a method of organization. By finding something that was, in a workable sense, *like* an abstraction, a medieval thinker was preparing to do intellectual labour. Just as physical labour requires efficient technologies and correct technique, so too did its abstract counterpart.

In the likeness of an element — a sensible, substantial entity of the natural world — thought found a compelling technique of memorization and organization. It was an intellectual labour-saving device. Aqueous qualities drew from the primary traits of water as one of the four elements of the terrestrial world. Mary Carruthers writes that for medieval thinkers, ‘a memory is a mental picture [...] of a sort which Aristotle defines clearly in *De Anima*, an “appearance” which is inscribed in a physical way upon the part of the body which constitutes memory’.<sup>59</sup> In the space of the mind shaped by the practise of the *ars memoria*, these images then inscribed themselves upon the mind, adding to the great storehouse in which the memories resided, waiting for use by other faculties. Water and its fellow elements of earth, air, and fire existed not only as ideas of matter, but as ideas enshrined in the composition of Creation, from the highest realms to the smallest of details. Once observed and inscribed upon the mind, the similitudes of the elements served to bring colour to visualization of thought. The images completed their journey through the cycle of abstraction by enhancing the imagination of perceived material things. Together, objects of nature and objects of thought were co-significant and co-creational.

The effect of causative likeness on signification resembles a phenomenon observed by Umberto Eco known as ‘semiotic condensation’. As a result of an extended metaphor — in this case the two metaphors ‘systems of thought are a hydrology’ and ‘thought is water’ — the properties of water and thought merge

<sup>58</sup> In a Platonic context, true meaning would more appropriately be a reflection of the forms. In an Aristotelian context (as was increasingly common throughout the thirteenth century), *phantasmata* were not deceptions but constructs created by the soul through experience. Minnis, ‘Medieval Imagination and Memory’, p. 240. This notion was echoed centuries later by Hegel, who claimed that ‘in the idea of the four elements we have the elevation of sensuous ideas into thought’ *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, as cited in Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 18–19.

and their boundaries become indistinct. As Aristotle puts it in his *Poetics*, 'by naming one thing with something else's name, one denies the first thing those qualities proper to it'. As a result, 'two images are conflated, two things become different from themselves, and yet remain recognizable, and there is born a visual (as well as conceptual) hybrid'. Once the components of the metaphor are separated, they retain the traits of that with which they were in a metaphorical relationship, which is now a 'secondary phenomenon', as a consequence of the preliminary metaphor.<sup>60</sup> The substance of elemental matter, like water, was active, mobile, and persistent in qualities even when all other mutable things were in a state of flux. Elements were the raw materials of Creation, possessed of qualities that were both inseparable and integral. The substantial traits of the elements existed along axes of balance and correspondence within which the natural order was shaped. The elemental qualities of water were present in all things that were water-like; the *idea* manifested itself in diverse material *realities*.

Medieval thought could find no more potent mental concepts than the characteristics of an element, an entity defined by qualities deep within the makeup of cosmic composition. To Evelyn Edson and Emilie Savage-Smith, 'elemental combinations led, in the medieval mind, to numerous correspondences — another characteristic of the universe, that all is connected'.<sup>61</sup> The likeness of human intellectual discourse to these dynamics was not simply coincidental, but *causative*. That is to say, the elements caused ideas to be like them, and the ideas caused the elements to resemble their dynamics. The common source of their meaning was shared, and thus their form was linked. Not only were they causative, but they were significative and significant as well. To use aqueous imagery was to evoke a true but inaccessible metaphysical order through a visible and natural order with cognate properties. As Robertson has observed, '[m]atter in the Middle Ages was not coextensive with materialism: in natural philosophy, it was seen to be a combination of the material and immaterial'.<sup>62</sup>

Thomas Aquinas argued in his treatise on *The Mixture of the Elements* that 'the powers of the substantial forms of simple bodies are preserved in mixed bodies'. 'Thus', wrote Aquinas, 'the forms of the elements are in mixed [bodies] not actually but *virtually*'. Although not remaining 'actually' in the new substance, Aquinas believed that neither substance nor element was corrupted, and the elemental

<sup>60</sup> Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> Edson and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Robertson, 'Medieval Materialism', p. 115.

power — namely its qualities — were preserved.<sup>63</sup> Thus, elemental properties such as denseness or coldness (those characterizing water) were ideas of matter present in all composites. Aquinas claimed that the traits of the elements remained in virtuality even when the actuality of matter had been formed:

So therefore, when the perfections (*excellentiis*) of the elementary qualities are relaxed, a kind of intermediate quality is constituted out of them that is the proper quality of the mixed body, yet differs in diverse [mixed bodies] according to the diverse proportion of the mixture.<sup>64</sup>

The quaternary correspondences found within many medieval treatises and their diagrams depicting the balance of forces — be they elemental traits, humours of the body, cardinal points, or dispositions of the spirit — were essential to the proper apprehension of substance and its qualities. These qualities, usually placed on a four-point continuum with a balance represented in the centre, were all part of single, causative, divine holistic order. The balance of powers combined to form the substance of all, be it elemental, natural, geographical, or bodily.

Within a vast and elaborate web of possible elemental traits, water — or more precisely the *idea* behind any aqueous behaviour in matter — had distinct and necessary qualities. In his twelfth-century text *De commixtionibus elementorum*, Urso of Calabria mapped out the traits of the elements in enormous detail. Each element was thought by Urso to have one essential quality as well as several accidental ones. The element of water was considered to be ‘substantially’ cold, and ‘accidentally’ wet, heavy, mobile, obtuse, soft, liquid, flowing, thick, white, and inclined ‘to the centre’ (*ad centrum*).<sup>65</sup> Together with its co-elements, water has truly essential properties at the level of simple behaviours like viscosity and mobility. As a result, any metaphor involving water was not simply a convenient mechanism for meaning but an evocation of traits primary to all of Creation.

<sup>63</sup> When reaching his conclusions as the nature of the elements, Aquinas first explains the theories of *Averroës* (c. 1126–98) in his *De caelo* and Avicenna (c. 980–1037) in his *Sufficientia* and commentary on Aristotle’s *Generation and Corruption*, showing the influence of Muslim theories of cosmology in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Aquinas, ‘On the Mixture of the Elements’, ed. by Klima, Allhoff, and Vaidya, p. 170. My italics.

<sup>64</sup> Aquinas, ‘On the Mixture of the Elements’, p. 170.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Dales discusses the influences upon Urso’s text, and identifies the influences upon *De commixtionibus elementorum* as follows: Alphanus’ *Prenom physicon*, Constantinius Africanus’ *Liber pantegni*, Plato’s *Timaeus* with Chalcidius’ commentary, Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis*, and William of Conches’ *Dragmaticon philosophiae*. This places the text in a long line of medieval elemental treatises. Dales, ‘A Twelfth-Century Concept of the Natural Order’, p. 188.



From the moment of their generation, all substances participated in and together constituted a delicate elemental balance that would eventually succumb to corruption. When asked to define *substance*, William of Conches argued that ‘in the same way that the act of living is called life, so the act of subsisting is called substance’. Referring to Aristotle, William proposed that ‘[g]eneration is an entrance to substance; corruption is a departure from substance’. Thus, the sum total of matter generation led to *substance*, the act of existing (or ‘subsisting’) as a composite entity with a fixed form. Substance was, to quote William, ‘a thing existing in itself’.<sup>66</sup> Once substance had been created through the generation of matter, the elements were thought to replicate their character in the things that contained them. Thus, the act of existing as a corporeal being within the medieval natural order was, by definition, a participation in the traits of substance. As a result, substance was *ontological* as well as physical, for it formed the core identity of a thing. Furthermore, this identity was contingent upon the elemental qualities of substance. Within this thought-world, like calls to like, and thus the substance of the mind mirrors the substance of the elements.

### *The Rhetorical Colores of Water*

There are bonds between water and thought that go beyond materiality and into the realm of application. The rhetorical deployment of water as a rich vocabulary for mapping thought is unique, for although it shares fundamental commonalities with all deployment of abstractions, the touch of water brings about something unique. Water has a unique register of traits that give it a distinct set of rhetorical qualities, and these qualities can be deployed in figurative expressions. It assists in the mapping of complex content, for it presents practical and yet vivid structures within the mind for the negotiation and recollection of ideas. Water functions in all three of the compositional traditions identified by Mary Carruthers within the medieval art of graphical composition within the mind’s eye:

[T]here are three main strands of influence converging in [the] familiar medieval device for the craft of composition of a ‘picture’ painted in and for the mind’s eye. These are *ekphrasis* or *descriptio*, a composition exercise taught as part of the craft of ancient rhetorical composition; the kataskopic view from above, taught as a

<sup>66</sup> William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy*, trans. by Ronca and Curr, I, 2, p. 6.



spiritual exercise in ancient philosophy and mystical disciplines; and the exercise of previsualization that was practised in many crafts [...] to which the composition of text was frequently likened in medieval rhetoric.<sup>67</sup>

It would be overly convenient to claim that no other entity can do as much in rhetoric as water can, but it is certainly true that images played out through the frame of water engender unique effects and subtleties. Water is *ekphrastic*, for it provides a narrative frame within which an extensive evocation can take place. It is *kataskopic*, for the view of a river system from above provides a distant reading of structure. It allows *previsualization*, for one can frame a moving river within the mind, shaping an ecological construct just as a mason might imagine a completed structure before putting chisel to stone. It is a broad and intuitive vision of knowledge as hydrological entity, and yet capable of great sophistication. Complex water metaphor within rhetoric is not presented as an *exemplum* (a mode of content), but as an aid to comprehension and a tool for further meditation (a mode of form).<sup>68</sup>

Thinkers such as those found within this book were no strangers to the manifold techniques of the rhetorical arts, and were particularly skilled in the art of the *figura* (the illustrative figure). Peter of Celle, the subject of Chapter 4, is a particularly relevant example. As a Benedictine practitioner of what can be described as the internal and external techniques of discipline and self-fashioning, Peter turns to the technique of expression through images. ‘Imagination’, Stahuljak and her co-authors propose, ‘is one of the favourite tools that Peter uses to represent invisible realities, invisible because they are from another world or because they are internal’.<sup>69</sup> His repeated deployment of visual evocation to signify invisible abstraction is particularly sophisticated. In her analysis of Peter, Mary Carruthers identifies a passage within his treatise *On Conscience* in which he addresses the reader, presenting an *exemplum*:

Not by way of idolatrous error but by way of making abstract doctrine evident [to the eye of your mind], form in your mind something that at the same time may prick [*compungat*] your pious mind to devotion and raise your soul *from visible form to invisible contemplation*.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Carruthers, ‘Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye’, p. 302. Note that the *Descriptio* of Clairvaux in Chapter 5 can also be seen as a compositional exercise, rendering the literal landscape and its exegesis as a form of painting within the mind’s eye of the reader.

<sup>68</sup> Carruthers, ‘Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye’, p. 289.

<sup>69</sup> Stahuljak and others, *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 64.

<sup>70</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 206. My italics.

Medieval monastics, through their love of *exempla*, were participating in the tradition of the medieval *ars rhetorica*, a skill intrinsically linked to literate monasticism.<sup>71</sup> They were practising a long tradition of rhetorical expression through the device of a figure or exemplar created to demonstrate an obscure or abstract point veiled in invisibility by way of an image for the mind. Through the stimulus of metaphor and the suggestive exegetic qualities of scriptural evocation, such writing leads the mind of the reader down a path to greater patterns. These images could be, and frequently were, indebted to the material qualities of water, as the following passage from the *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury demonstrates:

Grammar and Poetry are poured without stint over the length and breadth of their [the classical authors'] works. Across this field [...] Logic, which contributes plausibility by its proofs, weaves the golden lightning of its reasons: while Rhetoric, where persuasion is in order, supplies the silvery lustre of its resplendent eloquence.<sup>72</sup>

The visual impact of painting such a picture was a powerful rhetorical technique. Through its use, we apprehend not only the *image* but the *structural logic* of inter-related and interconnected fluidity — in this case the spread of grammar like a great flood of words — serving to enrich rhetoric with an additional layer of representative force. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes the rhetorical device of the simile as 'the comparison of one figure with another, implying a certain resemblance between them'.<sup>73</sup> The task of the monastic writer, and indeed of any *rhetor*, was to spin a dense web of imagery from the skeins of this likeness. The goal of the rhetorical mnemotechnical craft of thought was, in Carruthers' words, 'to give the orator the means and wherewithal to invent his material, both beforehand and on the spot'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, through the ad hoc deployment of flexible images such as water, the *rhetor* was able to make use of the 'compositional art' of *memoria* to shape his

<sup>71</sup>The original Ciceronian configuration, designed for public speaking, covered the essential skills of a successful *rhetor*. First came *inventio* (finding material), then *dispositio* (arranging it), then *elocutio* (putting words to invented material), then *pronuntiatio* (physical delivery), and finally *memoria* (retention of words, their order and their meanings). Peter deploys the *ars dictaminis*, a form of this technique adapted to letter writing. *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, trans. by Murphy, p. ix.

<sup>72</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, I.XXIV, as cited in McCarthy, *Humanistic Emphases in the Educational Thought of Vincent of Beauvais*, p. 87. This trope of gold as logic and silver as eloquence is repeated by Godfrey of Saint-Victor in the *Fons philosophiae*. See Chapter 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. by Caplan, p. 387.

<sup>74</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 9.

letters into something that functioned as both a creative exposition of ideas and a manner of remembering them.<sup>75</sup>

Within a schema of tense but expressive figurative rhetoric, water performed its own specific role, its uses shaped by its material and connective qualities. Water, as is the case in nature, links *loci*, shifts continuously, vivifies, nourishes, and participates in a repetitive cycle of ideas. Aqueous rhetoric enables a flexible and commodious network of ideas to emerge within the mind as *imago*. Due to the reader's preconceived notions of Scripture, nature, and material behaviour, a tiny sentence unlocks a broader watery world. Monastics evoked this world by shaping their apprehension and retention of literature into a landscape to be navigated, as Mary Carruthers describes:

One 'sees' one's reading, and one 'walks' through it, not just to store it away conveniently and safely, in order to be able to reconstruct it as it was, but also in order to meditate on it, digest it, interpret it, and make it fully useful, ethically and compositionally.<sup>76</sup>

Although water is not the only form of intellectual metaphor, it is a distinctive one with particular useful qualities. A landscape of images must have not only rivers, but trees, rocks, a sky, ground, figures, structures, and so on. Within this landscape, the four elements occupy a primary and potent position. Each part of the tetrad has rhetorical value, and it is important to understand that each is but an ingredient of a subtle mixture.

One may very well ask why air cannot symbolise thought, for example, and indeed it can. Air, however, is light and warm, whereas water is heavy and cold. Both flow thickly, and yet air attempts to escape to the heavens, whereas water tends towards the centre. The rhetorical *colores* of water, the figures of speech that give meaning beyond literal interpretation, cannot be wholly replicated by any other element, nor can water replicate the effect of another form of rhetorical imagery. Air is an invisible, highly mobile, and yet insubstantial liquid, whereas water is visible, less mobile, but more viscous. Air is very much an intellectual entity, and yet it does not appear to the mind's eye with the facility and flexibility of water, which is able to follow the path of a riverbed just as a structured network of ideas must follow the paths laid down for it from point to point, twisting back and forth between source and destination. Water, for that matter, must have a source and a destination, for its heavy fluidity demands it. Air can be anywhere and is thus, in a certain

<sup>75</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 110.

sense, nowhere. Water, on the other hand, is dense enough to be properly perceptible to humans, and yet also connects with the divine. It is flexible and dynamic within the visualised landscape, and yet organised enough to form a useful mental model. When the intellectual poetics of air are compared to those of water, the former evokes fancy where the latter evokes contemplation.<sup>77</sup>

The *denseness* of water makes it a fitting companion to thought, whereas the *diffuseness* of air lends to it intangibility unsuitable for logical and discursive thought. It is not fanciful to claim that in a very real sense, water was the very material epitome of a downward flow. In comparison to the flighty and ascending thought of air, however, water was dense and substantial, suitable for the traits imagined of thought. Steven Mentz puts it:

Unlike the periodic rhythms of oceanic time, airy chronology expands, dissipates, gusts and vanishes. It leaves material traces, including wind-eroded rock formations, but never remains still long enough to be visible. It passes over and through all boundaries.<sup>78</sup>

The metaphorical power of air lies in its invisibility, whereas water fills in a gap in the chasm between idea and image by its appearance within the mind's eye. Rhetorical use of the material evokes a complex image with an economy of words, and yet its material register speaks with different *colores*; its structural arrangement evokes different thought-worlds. The language of the solid differs fundamentally from that of the liquid in its rhetorical function. Take the image of a building and the materiality of dressed stone: carefully composed and enduring, the rhetoric of edifice emulates the permanence of construction within speech brought about through a more structured, more persistent form of abstraction. Every material has a power and these powers often intermingle, and yet an element, by its very nature, represents the stem of properties pertaining to its constituent traits: water, for instance, is the *simplest* thing that is cold and moist.<sup>79</sup>

Take for example, a passage on scriptural exegesis from the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint-Victor, in which human attempts at biblical interpretation are likened to the building of an edifice in a neat and orderly fashion. 'Divine Scripture',

<sup>77</sup> Note that Gaston Bachelard titled his essay *Air and Dreams*, an essay on 'the imagination of movement', whereas *Water and Dreams* was an essay on 'the imagination of matter'. For my further research on Gaston Bachelard derived from this book, see Smith, 'New Bachelards?'.

<sup>78</sup> Mentz, 'A Poetics of Nothing', p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Simplicity evokes both the divine simplicity of God, and the undifferentiated ur-properties of matter.

proposes Hugh, 'is like a building, in which, after the foundation has first been laid, the structure itself is raised up; it is altogether like a building, for it too has its structure'.<sup>80</sup> Hugh has painted a compositional picture, and yet this picture is distinctly craft-based. Having made his initial point, Hugh expands upon his compositional metaphor in more depth:

Take a look at what the mason does. When the foundation has been laid, he stretches out his string in a straight line, he drops his perpendicular, and then, one by one, he lays the stones, and still others, and if by chance he finds some that do not fit with the fixed course he has laid, he takes his file, smooths off the protruding parts, files down the rough spots, and the places that do not fit, reduces to form, and so at last joins them to the rest of the stones set into the row.<sup>81</sup>

By evoking the rhetoric of edifice, Hugh builds something slow, solid, precise, and measured. Scripture, the great supporting pillar of medieval thought, is rendered as an enduring structure. The durability of the great edifice is a fitting memory house for the truths of things, the *sententiae*. It is a product of deliberation, craft, and attention to detail. Although such constructs decay and fall, as does the human mind, they echo the glory of an eternal and celestial archetype. Building is also a fashioning of thought, an intellectual coming-into-being. Stone by stone, chisel blow by chisel blow, the mason shapes something from the raw material at hand. It is a superb metaphor for lasting intellectual achievement. It is an equally crucial — albeit different — register of monastic intellectual rhetoric. It also represents the profound bond between intellectual labour and physical labour that so proliferates within monastic exegesis and rhetoric. Just as the rhetoric of monastic establishment is nourished by the language of triumph over the wild natural landscape and the raising of great structures in praise of God and in the likeness of the heavenly Jerusalem — an abbey church, a cloister, a complex of needful buildings — so too does the rhetoric of environment represent the shaping and taming of landscape for the exercise of monastic power — they are separate, and yet complementary, *colores* of monastic rhetoric.

Despite their synergies, the scale of architectural temporality is entirely different from that evoked by water, implying a fixed form rather than an ever-changing river which, as Heraclitus claimed, is impossible to step in twice. Buildings last — albeit with constant devotional embellishment and repair — whereas water continues to pass. Its path can be controlled, but its dynamism is its rhetorical

<sup>80</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, VI.4, p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, VI.4, p. 141.

*sine qua non*. The source of meaning for Hugh's architecture and water is shared, and yet the manner of its representation differs. Making a mark on such a solidified scriptural composite is both a trial and an enduring achievement. It is made of small and solid units that, when combined, form a lasting entity. Exegesis is the masonry of Scripture, its art:

But if he finds some to be such that they cannot either be made smaller or be fitly shaped, he does not use these lest perhaps while he labors to grind down the stone he should break his file.<sup>82</sup>

Sacred science, unlike the subtleties of flowing water, is an act of artifice, the raising of a mighty, irreducible unity for the ages. It is the *product*, whereas water is the *medium*. Flaws are to be corrected, inaccuracies rectified, and pleasing lines and proportions retained throughout. Water requires rhetoric of natural dynamism; masonry requires rhetoric of human artifice. Whereas the assumption of aqueous rhetoric is often 'x is like y by virtue of a law or property of nature' (the inevitability of water falling from the sky, for example), rhetoric of edification assumes that 'x is like y because of a similarly planned structure'. The two forms of similitude may ultimately seem to be different facets of the same schema — all is, after all, derived from God's design — and yet the two operate in entirely different registers. In one case the forces that lend power to rhetoric draw on the properties of nature; in the other case, the properties of human beings and their arts shape nature.

As in ecological entanglements, the parts merged to form a larger system. Many of the entities within the world that we might now call natural or ecological could have counted as *machinae* within a medieval definition — the world-system was, after all, the *machina mundi*. Alexander Neckam, when entering a discussion of firmament and mutable world, proposed that 'the machine of the world [*machina mundi*] is divided into paired parts'.<sup>83</sup> A machine need not be of human design, and there are few entities within medieval life that so blur the boundaries between human and non-human machination. Hydraulics, for example, is a melding of a human machine (the mill wheel, irrigation, the hydraulic trip hammer) and a non-human machine (the river, the watershed, the watershed of a region, the global hydrology). The machines that are set into grinding and jerking motion by the power of water are mental models derived from the language of agriculture, tendencies of affordance and limitation. The motion of the

<sup>82</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, VI.4, p. 141.

<sup>83</sup> 'Diuiditur geminas in partes machina mundi...', Alexander Neckam, *Suppletio defectuum*, ed. by Peter Hochgürtel, II. 1341, p. 169. My translation.

prime mover sets off a series of whirring complications within the device, be the system material or spiritual.

There were limited forms of energy available to medieval society, and their affordances and limitations shaped the abstract vocabulary. One could consume the stored biochemical energy of plants to feed human beings and animals, allowing muscle power to apply its own force. Mechanical devices such as windlasses, capstans, and treadmills could amplify this energy, as could the use of the wheel, the sack, the plow, and so on. Biomass could be burned for fuel or intensified through conversion into charcoal (pure carbon), bringing heat and energy. Further energy was needed to transport the raw materials needed for these tasks. Fossil fuels were limited: charcoal, coal, peat, mineral coal, wood. And finally, the effects of gravity drove air and water, providing potential energy for the windmill, the conduit, or the waterwheel.<sup>84</sup> In a spiritual context, energy was scarce and yet also derived from the application of potential energy mediated by artifice. The *machina mundi* was given force by divine energy — the prime mover. Energy came from outside of the temporal system, flowing into it with a power given movement by the gravity of causative principles. It then gave the elements their own unique affordances and traits, which merged to form the matter from which the created world was composed. Just as medieval people tapped into a tiny percentage of the sun's energy through hydraulics, so too did the water of medieval intellectual culture provide motive power through the infusion of divine power, setting the world-machine in process.

Rhetorical affordances added to material tendencies. The element of water has vitality and dynamism of form and expression within medieval thought, for it and thought were co-constituted in a very real sense.<sup>85</sup> There is flexibility of form and arrangement, coupled with a peculiar consistency. Water, ever in a consistent state of change, forbids an illusion of immutability. Although Hugh's masonry of the soul plays to the immutable and ideal form of architecture, the ideal of water is still water. Water is at every level of the celestial hierarchy, and thus thinking with water is both reliable and fickle. Its ideals lie with its divine Creator, and within the diverse path by which causation brings about the ever-changeable specificities of things. It is a queer entity, ubiquitous and yet resistant to codification

<sup>84</sup> As described in Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, pp. 196–214.

<sup>85</sup> This expression takes on an extra level of meaning in the medieval context, for it was through common expression of the Platonic 'real' or Aristotelian divine pre-categorical singularity that intellection and water were one.



and solidification of meaning.<sup>86</sup> It mutates and changes, seldom content to fill its allotted space, and yet passing through a series of manufactured abstract conduits. It is distinct, but part of a greater whole. The elements, although separated by hierarchy (earth at the base, fire at the apex), are intermingled at all levels. The elements are, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen puts it, 'laddered in theory but admixed in motion'.<sup>87</sup> None of the models created by monastic minds are 'neat', even when they are elegant. They are filled with contradictions, internal inconsistencies, and evidence of debates within the intellectual communities that produced them. They mingle unpredictably, just as the elements were thought to mingle in their composition of matter. Elemental qualities provided vocabulary and a certain grammar, but their meaning could not exist without intermingling.

Like a true hydrology, the hydro-grammatical system formed by John of Genoa completes a full cycle; streams of words pour from the fountainhead of primary grammar through its derivatives, and, as a sentence, return to the grammar from whence they came. It is a *minor mundus*, a little or lesser world within a sentence. It is a contraction that, through microcosm, mirrors the character of the whole in a fashion that would have been comfortable to the medieval thinker. The bonds of water and intellection appear within a medieval context as an interlinked hydrology of abstraction, pulsing with the vitality of the *vis naturae*, the power of nature.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert put this idea succinctly, arguing that 'The elements — tangible, desirable — offer a queer yet pedestrian ecomaterialism, one that views the world askew 'from ground level', a horizontal or planar wandering *through* and *with* that engendered in the Middle Ages and Renaissance new narratives, possibilities and futures'. Cohen and Duckert, 'Howl', pp. 4–5.

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, 'The Sea Above', pp. 105–06.

<sup>88</sup> This image of medieval aqueous materialism draws much from the vibrant materialism of Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*.



epidicticam. i. demonstratiua. & sophistica.  
 .i. fraudulentam ac ficta m.

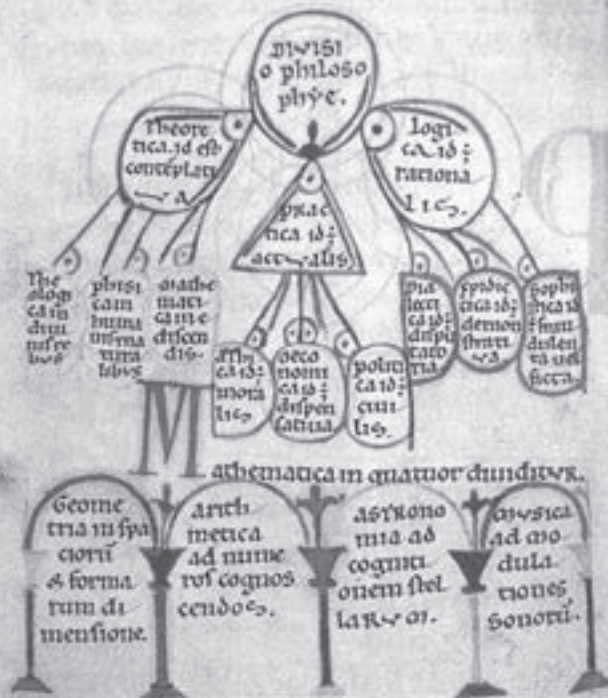


Figure 5. 'British Library Manuscript Royal 7 D II, Table of Philosophy (*Liber de Philosophia Salomonis*)', London, British Library, MS Royal 7 D II, fol. 9<sup>v</sup>. Second quarter of twelfth century. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

‘AN UNPOLLUTED SPRING’: GODFREY OF  
SAINT-VICTOR’S *FONS PHILOSOPHIAE* AND THE  
RIPARIAN LIBERAL ARTS

In this chapter we encounter a twelfth-century didactic poem — the *Fons philosophiae*, or Fountain of Philosophy — that merges the cascading hydrological structure discussed in the former chapter with the narrative structure of a poem, forming an entity that verbally sketches out a watercourse from divine source to intellectual destination. Laying out the foundations for a pre-defined and yet flexible system of knowledge, the poem then provides a course of navigation throughout its length and breadth that melds intuition, the multi-faceted application of a course (*cursus*) of study, and the challenges of nature-based poetry into a capacious and ecologically potent expression of an episteme.

The *Fons philosophiae* is a rhyming didactic poem presented by Godfrey of Saint-Victor in honour of his ecclesiastical patron Stephen of Tournai, newly appointed abbot of Saint Genevieve.<sup>1</sup> Stephen became abbot in 1176, and, although it is unclear exactly when Godfrey wrote and presented his treatises, it

<sup>1</sup> Synan’s introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 21. Synan’s introduction has recently been expanded upon and, to my mind, improved upon by Hugh Feiss in a recent introduction to selections from Godfrey’s *Microcosmus*. See Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘Godfrey of Saint-Victor: *Microcosm*’, trans. by Feiss, pp. 301–12.

must have followed this date.<sup>2</sup> In the poem, Godfrey framed in verse the Victorine educational pathway of spiritual endeavour that could lead the spiritual pilgrim on a path towards proximity with God.<sup>3</sup> This knowledge, in keeping with the Victorine penchant for mysticism coupled with liberal arts scholarship, would consist of a divine revelation facilitated by the exercise of intellectual enquiry. Godfrey, like his illustrious predecessor Hugh, strictly observed the rigour of liberal arts learning, while simultaneously being sensitive to the mystical ends of such learning for the reformation of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Edward Synan wrote in the preface to his translation that the poem is a 'joyous memoir' with a 'mnemonic pulse and beat'.<sup>5</sup> It is an interior spiritual journey that is explained, conducted and structured by a literary work.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Synan in his introduction to the English isometric translation of the poem, it has a 'jangling' quality to it: his poetry served to represent the inexorable burbling flow of the river within the metre of the Latin verse itself.<sup>7</sup> Hugh Feiss notes in the preface of his 2013 translation that 'Godfrey uses some very esoteric vocabulary' and

<sup>2</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 1002 (the oldest copy of the poem, written at Saint-Victor) places the date at 1178, which is credible. See Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Feiss, p. 374. Stephen of Tournai is also thought to have been a friend of Godfrey, and both men may have studied law in Bologna at the same time. Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Godfrey of Saint-Victor: Microcosm*, trans. by Feiss, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> See Coolman, *The Theology of Hugh of St Victor* for a thorough overview of Hugh's theology.

<sup>5</sup> Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> The poem is presented in the form of a meditative spiritual ascent, in the tradition of texts such as Augustine's *Confessions*, the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius, or later St Anselm's *Proslogion*, and followed in the thirteenth century by Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* and Dante's *Commedia* in the fourteenth century. See McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*.

<sup>7</sup> The Synan translation of the *Fons philosophiae* from the Latin is somewhat florid, and reads suspiciously unlike Latin prose. It is, by the admission of the translator, an 'isometric' English rendering of the Latin created in an attempt to capture its 'jingling verse' and cadence. The result is, in the words of Synan, sugary and cloying, but entertaining to read nevertheless. It is for this reason that I have opted for my own prose translations and the elegant but sensible rendering of Hugh Feiss. Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, pp. 28–29.

that he ‘needed to stretch Latin grammar and syntax to maintain his rhythm and rhyme’, making the experience of reading the poem somewhat strange on occasion.<sup>8</sup> It is not elegantly written and its rhymes are often questionable, but it is both memorable and full of content for the novice reader of the twelfth-century, and for the medievalist of the twenty-first. Godfrey’s enthusiasm for maintaining rhyme at all cost and providing a fluid, rattling rhyme are both striking. Take, for example, lines 17–20:

Curro properantius | cupidus uidere,  
Sitis extinguende spem | signa prebuere;  
Namque meis auribus | mox obstrepere,  
Murmure dulcisono | riui mille fere.<sup>9</sup>

The text is, at every level imaginable, bubbling with aqueous imagery, as if the pages that contain the text are a thin *integumentum* hiding a vast, powerful, and complex river in abstraction. The model of the *fons* as a source of life and knowledge was a recurring motif — the aforementioned *fons vitae* from John of Hildesheim, for example, or the *Liber de fonte vitae* by the Carolingian poet Audradus Modicus — but the application was novel. It is an Urry-esque scape mapped onto the familiar structure of the Seven Liberal Arts, equating the qualities of a river system with those of its subject matter on the level of form and content alike. There is a dizzying array of lessons on every conceivable aspect of the liberal arts within its 836 lines — categories of knowledge, their qualities, those that seek them, the morality of learning, the proper authorities to be consulted in doing so, the life of a Victorine canon — and yet they combine into a cohesive structure. The mode of representation, the image of the *fons* and its river, made this structure comprehensible and memorable. For its imagined medieval reader, the text could unleash a powerful flow of matter-energy-water from the hidden source, a flow that would wash into the mind of the reader, illuminating the mystery and excitement of the river source. Through this flow, the reader could learn of

<sup>8</sup> Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup> Translated and fully referenced in the discussion below. It is worth explaining the scansion of the poem at this stage in the chapter. The poem consists of four-line stanzas, each line consisting of thirteen syllables arranged into trochees with a *caesura* following the seventh syllable. There is a stress on the syllable before the caesura, and the rhyme of each line is carried by the pairing of a stressed and unstressed syllabic foot. I have maintained the *caesurae* in this Latin transcription (not part of the Michaud-Quantin rendering, but used by Feiss) to demonstrate the scansion, but they have been removed from subsequent passages. The extant manuscripts of the poem contained accented Latin, but this is not preserved in Michaud-Quantin.

the skills required to master the *artes*, but also the inexpressible bounty of sacred knowledge beyond the hierarchy of human knowledge. The power of the poem comes from the structure it provides, and the energy gifted to this structure by the fluid mode of thought within it.

Godfrey was a canon regular at the Abbey of Saint-Victor, the home to some of the most famous twelfth-century mixtures of the mystical and the scholarly tradition — expounded by giants such as Hugh, Richard, and Andrew of Saint-Victor.<sup>10</sup> A schoolman and master at the Paris schools from approximately 1144–55 prior to joining the Victorine Order, Godfrey is thought by Françoise Gasparri to have studied and taught theology at the school of Petit-Pont founded by Adam of Balsham (called Adam *Parvipontanus*) in 1132.<sup>11</sup> Upon joining the Victorines at Saint-Victor Abbey in Paris in about 1155–60, Godfrey found himself in a politically disturbed time for the Order under the incompetent Abbot Ernisius. Suffering the fallout from a political dispute with Ernisius and/or clashing with the anti-humanist Walter of Saint-Victor,<sup>12</sup> Godfrey was exiled (or ‘assigned away’, as Feiss puts it) from the Abbey to one of its priories in c. 1180.<sup>13</sup> Returning in about 1185–86 and serving as sacristan, Godfrey entered a productive period of his life that lasted until his death after 1194.<sup>14</sup>

During his time as sacristan, Godfrey turned his attention to creating a series of poems and treatises devoted to the cultivation of liberal arts wisdom and the mystical contemplation of human spirituality, as well as thirty-two surviving sermons.<sup>15</sup> In the tradition of his Order, Godfrey was a schoolman, but also a mystic and metaphysician, exhibiting a combination of the systematic intellectualism of a schoolmaster and the mystical emphasis of a monastic.<sup>16</sup> This was indicative of the Order itself. The Victorines were, as Hugh Feiss describes them in a fitting fluid simile, a confluence of ideas, attitudes, and practices:

<sup>10</sup> Notable examples are the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint-Victor, a mixture of mystical and scholastic learning, and the *De Trinitate* of Richard of Saint-Victor, in which the author attempts to reconcile dogmatic theology and reason.

<sup>11</sup> Gasparri, ‘Philosophie et cosmologie’, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Famous for his *Contra quatuor labyrinthos Franciae* (against the four labyrinths of France), an attack on the dialectic method in theology.

<sup>13</sup> Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 373.

<sup>14</sup> Feiss, ‘Preaching by Word and Example’, p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Feiss, ‘Preaching by Word and Example’, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, p. 19.

Estuaries, peninsulas, and other locales where currents from different sources mix ordinarily become very fertile and productive, and that was the case with the Abbey of St Victor, located on the edge of Paris. There the traditional forms and contents of the meditative theology of the monasteries met the emerging methods and questions of the theology of the schools; there the customs and practices of the monastic tradition mixed with efforts to reform ordained ministry and preaching; there the deliberate marginality of the monastic tradition mingles with involvement in the political life of the capital.<sup>17</sup>

Godfrey was an admixture of formative principles: a former schoolman, initiated into the Order at a comparatively late stage of life, and a man with a keen interest in both mystical theology and twelfth-century politics.<sup>18</sup> The *Fons philosophiae* reflects his many influences, and also the Order as a whole. It demonstrates both what Godfrey felt were the fitting components of a canon regular's life and what elements of the Order were worthiest of transmission to the next generation.<sup>19</sup> The poem enshrines liberal arts learning, reveals a clear system of political biases and beliefs, explores a didactic approach to mystical theology, and ends with a truly mystical experience of Christ through theology. The poem is not a political treatise, philosophy, or mystical vision, and yet all of them simultaneously. The resolution of this contradiction lies not in the *content* of the poem — names, principles, ideas, valences, etymologies — but in their *arrangement*. The structure through which Godfrey chooses to present them explains how these diverse influences are supposed to be apprehended as a whole and, as a result, a superlative structural device is required. Godfrey may disappoint in his poetry — Bernardus Silvestris, he is not — or the sophistication of his ideas — reconstituted Victorine norms — but he delights in his structural rhetoric.

Philippe Delhay, transcriber of Godfrey's *Microcosmus*, describes the text as a simple versified summary (*résumé versifié*) of Hugh's *Didascalicon*, a work more strongly related to Hugh than to his predecessor Richard.<sup>20</sup> Gasparri has agreed

<sup>17</sup> Feiss, 'Preaching by Word and Example', p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> It is also interesting to note that Godfrey, despite his rhetorical professions of humility, is an overtly political actor in a competitive intellectual world, valorizing Victorine learning and critiquing others. See Weston, 'Humility in a Competitive World' and Weston, 'Water, Words and Wisdom'.

<sup>19</sup> For a study that provides more focus on the Victorine and wider intellectual culture of the *Fons philosophiae*, rather than its expression of water as an intellectual entity, see Weston, 'Water, Words and Wisdom'.

<sup>20</sup> Delhay, *Le 'Microcosmus' de Godefroy de Saint-Victor*, p. 13.

with this assessment, arguing that although Godfrey was a contemporary of Richard, his ideas more closely reflect those of Hugh — the ‘Didascalie’ tradition taught at the school at this time — with elements of Godfrey’s exegetical liberal arts studies at Petit-Pont.<sup>21</sup> Hugh Feiss also notes strong resemblances between the content of the poem and the *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury.<sup>22</sup> As an eccentric rendering of widely studied twelfth-century texts such as the *Didascalicon* and *Metalogicon*, the *Fons philosophiae* offers an opportunity to study the role of what I characterize as a hydrological form serving as a framework for systematized Victorine — and twelfth-century scholastic — content.

My focus within this chapter is upon the characteristics of the *Fons philosophiae* that stem not from its *contents* but from its hydrological *form*. Synan largely discounts the river structure of the poem as an allusion to ‘the image so often used by biblical authors, according to which wisdom is a complex of flowing streams’.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, the hydrological structure of the poem creates a poetic form evocative of the hidden structures and interconnections of Victorine thought. Rather than a derivative mishmash of tropes and *figurae*, Godfrey’s hydrology must be appreciated and studied as irreducible complexity within the text.<sup>24</sup> The diverse complexity of medieval knowledge flows between nodes within a system, waiting to be explained to the reader. Further study of this structure can inform our understanding of Godfrey, his works, and the late twelfth-century Victorine canons, and allow us to explore the narrative and structural conceits of medieval abstract visualization through the deployment of water imagery in the *Fons philosophiae*.

The text has much to recommend it as a study in medieval metaphysical abstraction, containing all that is necessary — in the view of the author and implied audience — to apprehend the conceits, delights, goals, and pitfalls of learning to a medieval mind in the form of a riverine network. Merging ecology and epistemology, the structure of knowledge appears bonded to the experience of navigating and drinking from a river system. It both forms a river system from the collected imagery of

<sup>21</sup> Gasparri, ‘Philosophie et cosmologie’, pp. 120, 123.

<sup>22</sup> Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, pp. 380–81.

<sup>23</sup> Synan’s introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> It is for this reason that I have elected not to provide a diagram of the *Fons philosophiae*. It is an entity that is meant to emerge from mental mapping and it is my contention that visualizing it would reduce its efficacy as a primary source. For those interested in the exact contents of the poem, its headings and sub-headings are available in Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, pp. 374–76.



the natural and biblical world and then imbues this system with a self-perpetuating dynamism of imaginative and pedagogical force. Beyond pedagogy, the river system within the text manifests a structural representation of monastic thought *as imagined* by a monastic thinker and yet *as manifested* in poetics. The text, through the motif of the river, seeks to expose the main conceits of Victorine thought, identified by Brian FitzGerald as 'the unity of all knowledge, the interrelationship of the liberal arts and their importance for an understanding of the divine'.<sup>25</sup>

The *Fons philosophiae* touches upon many popular themes of twelfth-century intellectual discourse — the categorization and disposition of the liberal arts, the education of novices into an intellectual tradition, the dispute between philosophical schools and controversies, the praising or damning of certain ideas or forms of inquiry. It is an exploration of inner life, an allegory for the learning process, a schema for the arrangement of ideas, and a guide to the cultivation of virtues and the extirpation of vices. It plays upon a long history of images and tropes, from the hallowed image of the *Fons philosophiae* itself to the cataloguing of the best and brightest minds of the early Christian and classical worlds.

Rich in imagery, the poem is given cohesion, holistic meaning, and a mechanism for motion by the unifying power of riverine imagery. Water provides a fruitful object for study, both within this poem and within monastic thought as a whole, because it is the motive essence binding together and vivifying thought, providing order and mutability, structure, and a hint of chaos. Through this binding of trope, idea, and content into a hydrological whole, water gives the *Fons philosophiae* the power to teach us of the aqueous resonances of medieval abstraction while simultaneously illuminating the process by which abstraction is formed from the nebulous mass of invisibility and networked into a logical system. In this chapter, I will explore the pattern of the poem, and how water provides it with its structure and vocabulary.

### *Godfrey of Saint-Victor and His Poem*

The text of the *Fons philosophiae* was originally one of three treatises, presented together with the *Anathomia corporis Christi* (anatomy of the body of Christ) and *De spirituale corpore Christi* (on the spiritual body of Christ). Godfrey presented all three treatises to his patron as a matching set of spiritual works.<sup>26</sup> As members

<sup>25</sup> FitzGerald, 'Medieval Theories of Education', p. 576.

<sup>26</sup> Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 19.



of an Order with a great emphasis on teaching, the canons regular of Saint-Victor held their own distinctive theories on the arrangement of knowledge, which are enshrined by and yet hidden within the structure of the poem. The poem is divided in two, with the first part being devoted to the Seven Liberal Arts, and the second part focusing on Theological Wisdom and the Sacred Page. This structure follows that of the *Didascalicon* of Hugh, likewise arranged into a section on the arts and a section on Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Its general model follows the apprehension of the *artes* into more divine waters, the study of theology. In both the case of the *Fons* and that of the *Didascalicon*, the two topics are not arbitrarily arranged, for following the rivers of the former liberal arts leads to the headwaters of philosophy, the practice of theology.<sup>28</sup> By structuring the poem in this manner, Godfrey created a fully articulated knowledge structure in aqueous form within a text coupled with a sense of dwelling within a structural hermeneutic system, of a being within its 'environment'. In this way, the text constitutes an interesting interpretation of the terms 'hydrology' and 'ecology', for it is both in detailed abstraction. It is water (*hydor*), an *oikos* (a dwelling place, in this case for the mind), and *logos* (a structured account).<sup>29</sup>

In the prefatory epistle to Abbot Stephen, Godfrey dedicated the poem with the rhetorical humility one would expect of a monastic addressing his superior, claiming that he submitted a 'brimming mixed cup' for his judgement.<sup>30</sup> According to a marginal notation in the Mazarine 1002 copy of the poem, 'the life of the author

<sup>27</sup> Taylor's preface to *Hugh of Saint-Victor, Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, pp. 44–45. There will be many citations of the *Didascalicon* in this chapter. This is a logical comparison, for this reading of the *Fons philosophiae* demonstrates that the poem follows the structure of the *Didascalicon* closely. This comparison is especially fruitful, for it not only sheds light on the *Fons*, but has a recursive impact on the reading of Hugh's treatise in equal measure.

<sup>28</sup> Part one takes up lines 45–464 of the poem and part two takes up lines 465–836.

<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the more ad hoc technique of Chapter 4 and the far more implicit representation of Chapter 5, the *Fons philosophiae* is very much designed to perform this purpose.

<sup>30</sup> 'Calicem plenum mixto vestre destinavi, Pater, eruditionis examinandum iudicio, quatinus utrumque sit in minibus vestris, eius videlicet vel status vel everso'. Lines 6–8, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 33. I have translated the Latin of the poem for use in my analysis, but all block quotes are taken from the recent prose translation by Hugh Feiss. See Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, pp. 371–425. All references include the page numbers for both the Feiss translation and Michaud-Quantin's Latin. The Michaud-Quantin Latin is now available from the Brepols Library of Latin Texts A (LLT-A).

is written down metaphorically'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the poem is not only a figurative system of knowledge, but also a spiritual and pedagogical autobiography. The 836 verses of the poem retrace the steps of secular and religious training received by Godfrey and the character of the author as philosopher, theologian, and canon regular of the Victorine Order. This learning, rooted in knowledge of Scripture, the arts, the principal doctors of the Church, and the philosophical traditions of the twelfth century, differed from the more systematized epistemic frameworks of the Parisian schools — as I have discussed above, the Victorines merged the monastic and scholastic traditions. This was especially true in Godfrey's teleology of liberal arts learning, always presenting a system that enables higher learning rather than being itself an end. The poem ends with an undertaking on the part of the poet to make what he has learned about God known to all.<sup>32</sup>

For Godfrey, it was the role of the liberal arts to cultivate virtue and erudition for the purposes of greater divine revelation, to imbibe knowledge about Christ and about human salvation. Thus, in the words of Philippe Delhay, Godfrey was a 'theologian' and a 'psychologist', but by no means a 'scientist'.<sup>33</sup> More precisely, his interests were spiritual, narrative, and pedagogical, not classificatory or expository. As a result of its structure, the *Fons philosophiae* has a framework with a mission: it seeks to inculcate the reader in how best to assess the good and the bad in knowledge, how to harness the engine of learning that was the Seven Liberal Arts, how to follow the impetus of knowledge on a spiritual/educational *cursus*, and how to locate and apprehend the source of knowledge within the image of the fountain of philosophy. As Hugh puts it in his *Didascalicon*, the arts are ways (*viae*) by which 'a quick mind enters into the secret places of wisdom'.<sup>34</sup> In the following section, I map out the narrative of the text in a manner that explores both *what* is being

<sup>31</sup> Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 21. Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 1002 (c. 1178–80) is a particularly interesting copy of the poem, for it contains not one but two self-portraits of Godfrey, one preceding his sermons (fol. 2<sup>v</sup>) and the other at the start of the *Fons philosophiae* (fol. 144). On the fol. 144 portrait, Godfrey holds a book revealing his mastery of the three literary styles: 'prosa, rithmice, metrice'. See the *Enluminures* online archive for digitizations of select Mazarine 1002 folios, including the portraits, and a page of the *Fons philosophiae* (fol. 207).

<sup>32</sup> Lines 833–36, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 416; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> 'Godefroy sera un théologien et un psychologue, certainement pas un scientifique'. Delhay, *Le 'Microcosmos' de Godefroy de Saint-Victor*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, III.3, p. 57.

taught and the manner in which the branch-like river structure, the *viae* to knowledge, is embedded into the narrative to induce and enable learning through the mapping of visible aqueous motifs onto invisible abstractions.<sup>35</sup>

### *The 'Watershed' of the Seven Liberal Arts*

As the journey of the *Fons philosophiae* begins, the 'rivers' of the liberal arts are presented as a series of flowing streams, pouring forth from a lofty source to irrigate the plains of knowledge. The liquid representation of knowledge divides into many channels, placed into categories (separate river beds) by the schematization of the Seven Liberal Arts, irrigating the corners of the mind and drawing the attention of the pilgrim.<sup>36</sup> The river system acts — as the liberal arts themselves were thought to act — as a *techne*, a 'complete system based on a clearly established principle — on several different levels'.<sup>37</sup> In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh of Saint-Victor claimed that three levels of understanding were needed for reading: an understanding of what ought to be read, the order of reading, and the manner in which things ought to be read or to be imbibed.<sup>38</sup> The *Fons philosophiae*, written in the Didascalicon vein as it is, seeks to provide induction into these necessary traits. It provides, through water, a gradation of knowledge based on its aqueous characteristics (purity, pollution, aesthetic appeal, taste, colour, and so on), an order of reading predicated on the mapping of the river, and an account of the manifestations of 'reading' into the liberal arts in the form of a series of sights, vistas, and figures encountered upon the journey. Initially separated, a survey of each river led the assayer to learn connective strategies — according to Godfrey, for example, 'the study of speaking will connect the other [branches of philosophy]'.<sup>39</sup> Once the entire *cursus* was

<sup>35</sup> Once these *viae* were established, they could be evoked in a more implicit fashion through allegory and allusion, as is the case in Chapters 4 and 5 to follow. Godfrey is particularly interesting, since he is writing for an explicitly didactic purpose.

<sup>36</sup> 'The pilgrim' refers to the first-person narrator of and traveller within the *Fons philosophiae*. Although Godfrey makes no attempt to imply that the pilgrim is not him, his diagetic persona needs to be differentiated from Godfrey as author, since he has been placed in a figurative landscape and is, as a result, a figurative personification of the author as well as a synecdoche for all canons regular and all inquirers into poem's subject matter.

<sup>37</sup> Huntsman, 'Grammar', p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor's preface to Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Line 300, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 399.

understood, it was possible to approach theology, the theoretical branch of knowledge ascending into the heavens from which it came.

The landscape of the poem is both a single system for the generation of meaning and the discovery of truth, and a disparate gathering of individual tropes. It is the unifying logic of the river, both holistic connection and dynamic material allegory for the behaviour of learning, that makes meaning from confusion. The unification of knowledge into a single schema by the mutual connecting power of water binds idea to idea, rhetorical *color* to material image, human to environment, and source to destination. Unlike the more codified and detailed allegorical landscapes of later centuries — for example, the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, or Chaucer's *House of Fame* — Godfrey's landscape is structurally and materially as well as allegorically expressive. It provides moral allegory, but, more importantly, it provides a sense of how everything fits together and of the dynamics of motion that drive spiritual life. The structure of the poem is, to a certain extent, the secret to its meaning. The content of the poem is, as has been discussed, largely derived from the Didascalical tradition of the Victorine Order. The landscape, although by no means a wholly original formulation, creates a powerful device for the imagination of learning.

The narrative of the *Fons philosophiae* begins with the awakening of the author from a dream by the experience of a thirst for divine knowledge. This urge, instilled by the motivation of the Holy Spirit, sets the pilgrim upon his way. This passage captures the initial motive force behind Godfrey's allegorical quest for the fountain of philosophy, providing us with a compelling image of piety. The text begins with hope and with trust, an unshakeable belief in the providence of the Holy Spirit, and above all, with faith:

Noctis erat terminus et soporis mei, Et fugabat tenebras nuntius diei. Expergiscor nescius affuturi rei, Sacris ductus monitis et instinctu Dei. Exeo diluculo sub exortu lucis, Signans me signaculo sacrosancte crucis, Gratiam Paracliti peto mihi ducis, Dicens: Deus dirige me quo bonum tu scis.

(It was the end of the night and of my sleep, and the herald of day put to flight the darkness. I awake, ignorant of what is to come, led by sacred admonitions and a godly instinct.

I go out at dawn under rising light, signing myself with the sign of the most holy cross. I ask for the grace of the Paraclete as my guide, saying, 'God, direct me to the good you know'.)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Lines 1–8, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 390; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 35.

The dawn of a new day heralds the beginning of intellectual rebirth: the Holy Spirit prepares the soul for its journey, drawing it back to its source through the ascendancy of grace.<sup>41</sup> A mobile process of self-discovery and divine compulsion emerges, for whereas the pilgrim must seek self-enlightenment, God's motivation is ever-present in the form of grace. The Divine Presence, according to McMahon, 'is not only the end of the meditative quest but also its Origin'.<sup>42</sup> This event is, simultaneously, the autobiographical beginning of *Godfrey's* training in the liberal arts, and the *generalized* beginning of an implied Victorine *cursus* towards the *Fons*. Its image-making is doubly effective, for it provides not only an account of how one senior Victorine had come to imagine the spiritual landscape of learning, but also a schema for others to follow in his footsteps.

Within the passage, Godfrey gives the reader the *sine qua non* of the narrative: a motivation. The faith of the narrator provides the motive force behind the poem, faith in the much-needed guidance of the Holy Spirit in the seeking of the Good. It is within a faithful search for the Good that the reader finds the emotional heart of the poem. It is an expression of the Victorine desire to know philosophy through the arts while simultaneously sensing the mystical pull of the divine forces at the fountainhead of philosophy. Through the mediating influence of water, the connector of everything, the pilgrim is given the image of a destination, a target for the pull of his heart towards God.<sup>43</sup> Hence the name *Fons philosophiae*, for this font is both the motivation and the object of contemplation for Godfrey's poem. The pilgrim narrator hurries forward, motivated by a desire hear the liquid sound of knowledge in the distance:

Curro properantius cupidus uidere, Sitis extinguende spem signa prebuere; Namque  
meis auribus mox obstrepuere, Murmure dulcisono riui mille fere.

(I run more hurriedly, anxious to see, there have been signs holding out hope of  
quenching my thirst. For soon almost a thousand rivers astound my ears with their  
sweet murmuring.)<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> When discussing the relationship between water symbolism and spirituality, Veronica Strang proposes that '[b]eliefs about the Holy Spirit hinge on the idea of consciousness, the assumption that spiritual knowledge and wisdom permit conscious action, controlling the unconscious "animal" drives of "nature"'. Strang, *The Meaning of Water*, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Or a thirst for God, as in such passages as Psalm 41. 2: 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God'.

<sup>44</sup> Lines 17–20, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 390; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 35.

The path to knowledge begins, as many interactions with water do, with phenomenal impact. The delectable potential of knowledge in fluvial form, as with the experience of all riverscapes, begins before the water itself is visible. The sound of roaring water implies it all: space, force, power, and momentum. The roar of the rivers offers hope of plenitude. This is the first of many instances in the poem in which the experience of the river switches from an observer position to introspection of the emotional reaction excited by the rivers. In this manner, Godfrey, through the apparatus of his pilgrim persona, explores his personal experiences of learning and plots an affective path through the stages of learning. This is, to my mind, especially important, for desire for knowledge merges affect, structure, and directionality as one.

Once Godfrey encounters the agency and fascination of the riverscape, the poem begins with full force, pushing ever onwards and upwards. In his introduction to the poem, Synan offers a good précis of the path taken by the narrative:

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Godfrey prolonged his walking-tour in order to trace the streams of learning to their source, to the ultimate fountain, *fons*, from which they rise [...] Since [the] seven disciplines form an organic unity, an *enkuklios paideia*, Godfrey recognized that he must take them in their proper order, first the three arts of the *trivium* and then the four arts of the *quadrivium*.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, this episode is both a starting point to guide the learner onto the correct path and simultaneously a narrative of Godfrey's experience. It is reminiscent of the beginning of Dante's *Inferno*, in which the lost pilgrim is guided by the personified figure of Virgil to begin his quest. The pilgrim narrator of the poem, not long after the start of his journey, encounters the rivers of the liberal arts, flowing forth from the source of philosophy. The waters are imbued from their source with the dual colours of truth — the gold of wisdom and the silver of eloquence — and the dual effects believed by the Victorines to derive from divine revelation and grace — the enlightening of the mind with truth (*doctrina veritatis*) and the inflammation of the heart with love and virtue (*disciplina virtutis*).<sup>46</sup>

Although the pilgrim is far from the remote and lofty origin of this knowledge, the structure of the poem grants him a vision of the source and a speculation as to its history and nature to guide his journey. He glimpses a vista of the rivers of knowledge in their entirety, from distant lofty origin to mountain's base:

<sup>45</sup> Synan's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Synan, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 417, fn. 12.

Septem tamen transiens riuos computauī, Quos ab hac origine fluere notaui,  
Quorum sola nomina mente consignaui; Ceteros nec nomine discere curaui.

(As I passed I counted seven streams, which I noticed flowed from this source. I committed to memory only the names of these; I did not bother to learn the rest by name.)<sup>47</sup>

The reader is granted a powerful image of a figurative landscape, the form of which merges divine foreknowledge and visual memory to create a spatial imagining of the epistemically sufficient conditions of knowledge. The poem both implies that the rivers of knowledge are vast, manifold, and divided into categories, and establishes the superiority of the seven rivers of the arts as a starting point. Through a combination of foreknowledge and engagement with the spatiality of the river in abstraction, the pilgrim makes a journey that is both inductive and mobile. This image feeds into the many methods by which the abstraction that is the liberal arts has been represented. A part of the additional eloquence added to the imagination of knowledge stems from the complexity of the terrain. The eye of the pilgrim dwells upon a plain at the foot of a great mountain, is struck by its vast height, and is presented with a narrative of origin. It operates, unlike many other allegorical systems, in three dimensions. The terrain described by Godfrey has height, length, and width: it is a fully formed topological entity. The expression of the mental landscape of a place with a distinct series of axes allows both the sweep of the field and the vast height of the mountain to interplay, providing a fitting space for the motion of water and its myriad interactions. Casting the frame of the poem back to the Genesis myth, Godfrey imbues the distant peak of wisdom's mountain with a temporal as well as a spatial pull of origin:

Emanabat uertice montis fons illimis, Quem natura fecerat a diebus primis, Uiuē  
scaturiginis inexhaustus nimis, Qui de summo decidens influebat nimis.

(From the mountain's summit an unpolluted spring [*fons*] was flowing down, which nature had made in the earliest days; it was gushing, living, and inexhaustible. Coming down from the summit, it flowed to the lowest levels.)<sup>48</sup>

At several points in the poem, this being the first, the nature of the *fons philosophiae*, like a manifestation of divine will, make something of itself visible to the

<sup>47</sup> Lines 41–44, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 391; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> Lines 45–48, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 391; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 36.



observer. This passage gives the reader and us observers of the text in modernity, a notion of the space within which knowledge operates, the history of its provision, and the manner in which it moves, like water, from lofty origin to human locales. In this case, the panoramic view of knowledge's vista and the lofty height of the mountain establish the preconditions for movement. The pilgrim, as a man on the correct path to knowledge and guided by the Holy Spirit, is gifted with an understanding of how the river network he has encountered functions. Through this vision, one can imagine the sheer power and weight of liquid learning pouring, emanating downwards by means of a metaphysical 'gravity'.

Every aqueous image must have a solid against which to define itself. In the case of the *Fons philosophiae*, that solid is the terrain the river flows across. It provides the context within which water may have structural meaning, the immutability against which the mutability of water is contrasted so sharply. This is a *sine qua non* for any image of knowledge, for a schema of learning requires a mediating structure. Any riparian image means little without the terrain that surrounds it, for it is not water alone but its effect upon the earth that nourishes the ground, allows plant life, and allows surrounding ecologies to grow and flourish. The same is true of the image of a landscape presented within the poem — knowledge cannot exist without the supporting stasis of an encapsulating order.

Upon engaging with the seven rivers, the pilgrim discerns the threefold flow of the *trivium* bifurcating from that of the *quadrivium*. These three streams are the closest and most accessible of the seven, the starting point of a good liberal arts education. Like the three arts of grammar, logic and rhetoric, these rivers must be traversed and imbibed, their unique tastes discerned, before the pilgrim can approach the remaining four. When understood laterally as a part of three arts learned in sequence but practiced together, this allows the poem to present a vision of the *trivium* as part of both a diachronic journey of discovery and a multipartite whole. Once again, physical distance is equated with proximity within the path of learning necessary to master these seven. The first rivers to be encountered by the pilgrim represent the initial explorations necessary to follow the path to knowledge. All of the rivers are connected vertically to a common source, and yet each offers a unique insight. At the same time, the rivers must be taken in order, the experience of one allowing a journey to sample the next. The river of grammar, first in the sequence, is described as a widely peregrinating and nutritive watercourse made straight by intellectual clarity:

Horum primum spargitur campo latiore, Et per plana labitur uia rectiore; Hoc uirgulta tenera suo creat rore, Hoc fecundat alia uena pleniore.



(The first of these spreads out on a wider field, and runs down through level ground by a straighter way. This one creates shrubbery with its moisture and makes fruitful with another, fuller stream.)<sup>49</sup>

The topography of the river-space reflects the impression of the grammatical art that Godfrey wishes to teach. Through the pilgrim, the reader apprehends the direct and purposeful ‘straightness’ of grammar, together with the broad range of intellectual ‘spaces’ with which it engages. The shoots engendered by the nutrition of the river may be imagined to be the products of correct grammar — they are the etymological meanings of single words, their forms, the full potential of diverse lexemes. Like the all-encompassing rivers of the gospels, this river spreads to all corners, nourishing the correct use of language. It is the foundational flow of the *trivium* and of the liberal arts.

The nutritive power of this all-pervasive art becomes clear through a transfer of *viriditas* from the art to all that it encounters, demonstrating visually the salutary effect of grammatical mastery. All these traits can be, and were, frequently explained as a core requirement of the liberal arts education, and yet this formulation speaks to the imagination, and thus the understanding, holistically, visually, and spatially. The flourishing of spiritual and intellectual life is represented by the greening of the landscape engendered by the waters of the arts. Upon encountering the art of logic or dialectic, the abstract narrative continues:

At secundus transiens loca latebrosa, Rupes, lucos, inuia frangit scrupulosa; Huius uia strictior et amfractuosa, Huius aqua fortior et impetuosa.

(But the second, crossing hidden places, rocks, and woods, forces its way through rugged, trackless places; its way is narrower and broken [*amfractuosa*], its flow is stronger and more violent.)<sup>50</sup>

The interactions between fluid and solid, between riverbed and river, begin to emerge. It is as if knowledge, by being compressed by the rigorous constriction of the logical mode, becomes pressurized. It is a sharper, faster, more powerful, less clear-cut, and more dangerous form of knowledge. The image of rhetoric as a powerful, tortuous, treacherous, and yet ultimately edifying path, a kind of testing ground, is presented in an imminent, phenomenal form. Through this testing

<sup>49</sup> Lines 69–72, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 392; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Lines 73–76, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 392; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 37.

river, we get an impression of the probing, rigorous, attacking tenacity of dialectic. The opponents of the logician lie in wait in the hiding places of the river, ready to demolish the unwary, to find the weakness in their argument. The twisting and turning of the river represents the chicanes and pitfalls of dialectic and a material image in equal measure.

In the copious image of the river rhetoric, the beauty of verbal adornment is manifest:

Tertius lasciuiens per amena prati, Uernat flore uario sinus picturati, Huius fluctus ceteris longius uagati, Primum tardi postea currunt concitati.

(The third, frolicking through charming meadows, makes verdant with varied flowers. The painted hollows of this flood, wandering farther than the other, runs slowly at first, but then rapidly.)<sup>51</sup>

The aesthetic quality and fecundity of the rhetorical art forms an interesting counterpart to its fellows, and yet presents an entirely different picture. It winds languorously and irrigates an idyllic landscape of flowers, comparable to the eleventh century *Flores rhetorici* of Alberic of Monte Cassino, in which the author claims that the touch of the 'sun' of rhetoric produces 'mind flowers' (*flores mentis*).<sup>52</sup> The perceived beauty of rhetoric achieved by the adornment of words appears as the landscape of knowledge bursts into blooms of variegated colour, the tropes and figures, or *colores*, of rhetoric. Feeding the blooming of the mind, the broad river of rhetoric continues on its way, speeding up as the efficacy created by its bounty takes effect. One can imagine the initially pleasant and placid river of rhetoric, nourishing the beauty of adorned language (a garden of the mind, perhaps) while ever speeding up, passing through the rapids of the Ciceronian *constitutiones* (issues), from *dispositio* (arrangement) to *exordium* (introduction), to *narratio* (statement of the facts), into *partitio* (division), *confirmatio* (proof), *reprehensio* (refutation), and finally rushing into *conclusio* (conclusion).<sup>53</sup> Rhetoric, through this image, generates force and beauty in equal measure.

The river *rhetorica*, together with the broad spread of the river *grammatica* and the vicious and treacherous bends of the river *logica*, forms the three tributaries of the *trivium*, home to the intellectual cultures of Antiquity:

<sup>51</sup> Lines 77–80, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 392; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> 'radio Phebi tacta flores mens pariat'. Albericus Casinensis, *Flores rhetorici*, trans. by Inguanes and Willard, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Camargo, 'Rhetoric', p. 98.

Hoc est illud triuium late celebratum, Cunctis terre finibus longe peruagatum, Cuius ripis plurime site ciuitatum, Quorum quondam ciuibus contulit primatum.

(This is the widely celebrated *Trivium*, travelling far to all ends of the earth. On its banks sit many cities, to the citizens of which it once granted pre-eminence.)<sup>54</sup>

Within this passage, we get a sense of the pedigree of grammar, logic and rhetoric, as well as an indication of their widespread influence. Just as the river spreads to all corners of the earth, so too does the legacy of classical learning. Godfrey betrays a certain nostalgia for better days, in which the pre-Christian ‘towns’ of scholars drinking profitably from the *trivium* were greater.<sup>55</sup> The distinct symbolism of the river makes itself particularly clear, allowing the truth of the source to peregrinate throughout the intellectual world, enabling the fundamentals of the *trivium* to test the traveller and nourish the landscape of the mind and intellect with their *vis*. This is Godfrey as schoolman, echoing the sentiment of his contemporary John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* that the *trivium* — especially the dialectic and rhetorical arts and not simply grammar — must be respected and embraced before the sciences can be attempted.<sup>56</sup>

One of the strengths of the riverine structure within the *Fons philosophiae* is that it combines the materiality of water — its twists and turns, its flavours, its textures and properties — with riparian society. The poem creates a hydro-social arrangement between the rivers of learning and the numerous figures lining its banks — students, masters, great figures of history, and pilgrims passing through. A salient example occurs as the pilgrim passes through the riverscape of the *trivium*. Like a good schoolman, Godfrey’s rivers are not populated by learners alone, but shaped and engineered by the great intellectual heroes of grammar, logic, and

<sup>54</sup> Lines 81–84, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 392; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> As C. Stephen Jaeger has demonstrated, nostalgia for earlier, putatively ‘better’, eras was a perpetual theme of high medieval, and particularly twelfth-century, intellectual discourse. See *The Envy of Angels* and, more specifically, ‘Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century “Renaissance”’. See also Jaeger’s discussion of Godfrey’s *Microcosmus* and the decline of medieval humanism in his February 2016 California Medieval History Seminar talk ‘Godfrey of St Victor and the End of Medieval Humanism’, forthcoming as an article.

<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of the *Metalogicon* in comparison to the Victorine tradition, see FitzGerald, ‘Medieval Theories of Education’. Note also that Hugh Feiss has included footnotes referencing resonances of the *Metalogicon* in his *Fons philosophiae* translation. For the text of the *Metalogicon*, see John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury*, trans. by McGarry.

rhetoric. The *auctores* of Antiquity are all present along the river of the liberal arts: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Martianus Capella, Porphyry, Macrobius.

A river may have traits that exist independent of human intervention — flow, purity, colour, and so on — but it also must be mediated to reach its full *human* potential — diverted, put to hydraulic tasks, diverted for drinking. The intellectual spaces of the poem are no exception. The personalities of the poem inhabit the banks of the rivers, each offering a different way to delve the depths of the waters, discern new flavours, or bridge its span. The ancient masters of grammar, for example, dole out the waters of their art:

Primi ripe fluminis presidet Donatus: Puerorum series stipat eius latus. Quorum potu lacteo reficit hiatus. Uirga quoque faciles corrigit erratus. Huius ex opposito sedet Priscianus; Hunc et Appolonius et Herodianus. Instruit conserere cum Donatu manus, Alioquin fuerat hic conflictus uanus. Longa iuxta series sedet magistrorum, Longe copiosior grex discipulorum: Hii rimantur penitus ima fluentorum, Summa libant alii tactu labiorum.

(Donatus presides on the bank of the first stream, a line of boys presses in upon him, whose open mouths he refreshes with a drink of milk. His rod also corrects careless errors. Opposite him sits Priscian; Apollonius and Herodian instruct him to join hands with Donatus. Otherwise, there would be useless conflict. Nearby sits a long line of masters, and a much greater flock of disciples. These thoroughly explore the depths of the streams; others taste the surface with a touch of their lips.)<sup>57</sup>

Through Godfrey's intimate topographical and hydrological rendering of grammar, logic, and rhetoric through the imagery of a threefold river, the reader gains not only an understanding of the *trivium*, but an imaginal construct enabling personal and collective action. In the words of Beryl Smalley, '[a] Victorine was firmly persuaded that "all good things go in threes". He was obeying no mere convention when he expounded according to the three senses, but moving to the very rhythm of the universe'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in this context, the threefold art appears to be of particular interest to Godfrey. As a canon regular of Saint-Victor, schooled in the doctrine of his illustrious predecessors Hugh and Richard, he appears aware of the significance of the three. To Pythagoras, three was the number of completion, indicative of a beginning, a middle, and an end: a full cycle.<sup>59</sup> To the theologian, three was

<sup>57</sup> Lines 129–40, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *The Fountain of Philosophy*, trans. by Feiss, p. 394; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 39.

<sup>58</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 87.

<sup>59</sup> See Hiscock, *The Symbol at your Door*.

the number of the Trinity, and thus implied a vast array of higher meanings. In the section to follow, however, Godfrey's pilgrim passes beyond the realm of the *trivium* into the domain of *scientia*, and eventually knowledge of divinity through the cosmos.

Whereas spiritual knowledge leads the mind upwards to an illumination of what it is possible and desirable to know, worldly knowledge mistakes the path to knowledge as knowledge itself. The aqueous narrative of the *Fons philosophiae* moves beyond a structural narrative of learning into a treatment of moral purity. This is achieved through a complex hybrid of material imagery, in which the pilgrim encounters the offensive and stagnant pool of the mechanical arts, more akin to swamp than to river:

Cum uenissem proprius inuenitur primo, Locis in campestribus pede montis imo, Quem dicunt mechanicum fons obductus limo, Ranarum palestrum sordidatus fimo.

(When I have come closer, first I find in the fields, at the very base of the mountain, a spring drawn up from the mud that people call 'mechanical,' soiled with the dung of wrestling frogs.)<sup>60</sup>

By rendering the river of the mechanical arts overcrowded, polluted, and occluded, Godfrey has made an argument on many levels for another path. One gets the impression from this passage that Godfrey has appointed himself as spiritual 'dietician', attempting to judge the comparative nutritive merits of each river he encounters. This would make the mechanical arts a form of spiritual and intellectual 'junk food', appearing to offer satiety yet giving none: empty calories for the soul. Godfrey expresses his distaste for the mechanical arts by combining a lack of spiritual substance with the implication of moral turpitude through pollution.<sup>61</sup> It is important to note at this point that this seems to be a personal bias on the part of Godfrey, for the mechanical arts were commonly thought at the time — even by other Victorines — to remedy indigence of the body, one of the 'three plagues of man' identified in the twelfth-century *Dialectica monacensis*.<sup>62</sup> By introducing the

<sup>60</sup> Lines 21–24, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 390; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> In this, Godfrey disagrees with Hugh, whose template he usually follows. Hugh expresses more respect and sympathy for the mechanical arts, quoting the proverb 'Ingenious want hath mothered all the Arts' to argue for the necessity of the *ars mechanica*. Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, I.9, p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> The three 'plagues' of human nature were as follows: ignorance of the soul, indigence of the body, and vice of body and soul combined. Against these plagues three remedies were pro-

notion of knowledge valence through a distinction between aqueous purity and pollution, the text offers not only structure, but moral instruction.

In the description of the liberal arts, we see the manner in which Godfrey merges the hydrological form of the poem with his desired didactic message. On the topic of 'those who are students of the arts', the poem uses the motif of drinking to urge caution and a focus on divine things over hasty, foolish, intemperate clamouring for knowledge:

His fluentis assident haurientes multi. Hinc adolescentuli bibunt hinc adulti,  
Quisquis suo modulo sapientes, stulti, Quamuis preter ordinem ruunt inconsulti  
[...] Cumque credant alia gusto suauiora, Prima cece transeunt ut abiectiora, Nec  
aduertunt stolidi quod ulteriora, Sine fundamentis his ruunt absque mora.

(Many drink eagerly from these waters. From them teenagers drink, from them adults drink. Each does so in his own way, whether he is wise or foolish, although the rash rush is without order.

Inexperienced in things, they run without order, they do not have the clear eye of reason. Therefore, they pass by without seeing the truth, unless finally the evening light shines for them.)<sup>63</sup>

Godfrey appears to be arguing for due diligence in the experience of imbibing these waters. In addition to the structure and moral valence of the waters, there ever remains a human element to the interaction with this river. In questing for the source of the river, there is a correct time, and a correct place, to experience each taste, to view each stream on the path to mystical revelation at the summit. And when the time is right, both in the implied course of Godfrey's own education and the desired rectitude of the reader's, the narrative moves on from the *trivium* into the realm of the practical arts, the *quadrivium* of natural philosophy that separates from the three as they flow together from the heights.

The rivers of the *quadrivium* — the arts of geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy — were characterized by their study of things within Creation. Based on the fundamentals learned from the *trivium*, these four arts directed the natural philosopher to the hidden causes or eternal reasons that dwelt within the *species*, the form, of things. Hidden within the properties of things through similitude,

vided: the ability to acquire the liberal arts to school the soul, the ability to acquire the mechanical arts to make the indigent body productive, and the ability to acquire virtues for the negation of vice. *Dialectica monacensis*, ed. by Klima with Allhoff and Vaidya, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Lines 97–100, 105–08, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 393; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 38.

the qualities of *microcosmus* of the natural world reflected the higher nature of the *megacosmus*.<sup>64</sup> Through their studies, scholars of the four scientific arts could dive into the depths of Godfrey's rivers, bringing up new insights into the properties of things, and hence of their Creator. Classical erudition provided the analytical tools necessary to penetrate the mysteries of philosophy and, through philosophy, theology.

Godfrey describes the scientific arts with religious awe coupled with practical interest, for they were the application of the *trivium* and the path to the theoretical pursuits of theology. They were the tools by which mystical contemplation gave way to divine knowledge, the medium for the apprehension of a hidden message. Godfrey calls them the 'practical arts', flowing together from the source with the 'theoretical arts', or knowledge of Scripture, but dividing again after separating from the *trivium*.<sup>65</sup> Whereas the theoretical arts flow upwards towards heaven, the practical arts spread throughout the land. They soak the land, linking all things to the same source as that of heavenly knowledge.

By schooling the mind in systems of abstract thought such as arithmetic and geometry, the scholar perceived the fundamental regularity of Creation, this hidden matrix of order underpinning all things.<sup>66</sup> Through its apprehension, the mind became attuned to abstracts in general, and, once pierced, the veil of nature gave way to an all-encompassing causative schema. The quadrivial initiate could then delve the depths of natural mystery in search of its hidden causes, ultimately tracing them back to a singular cause. In the poem, Godfrey marvels at the transcendent and penetrating scope of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. He sees those who study the four as swimmers in the deep waters of natural mystery, like pearl divers braving the deep for hidden treasures. The poem claims that 'Ab his latens penitus promitur natura, Dum rimantur singula uigilanti cura' (all hidden by nature is brought to light, while they dive with watchful care one by one.)<sup>67</sup>

The secrets of the Sun's rays, of the tides, of the trembling of the earth: all of these things were the essence of God writ large across the face of the earth.

<sup>64</sup> This was the question that preoccupied Godfrey of Saint-Victor in his *Megacosmus*, in which he explored the correlation between the microcosm and the macrocosm in great detail.

<sup>65</sup> This division comes from Hugh's *Didascalicon*, in which he splits philosophy into four: the theoretical, the practical, the mechanical, and the logical. See Taylor's introduction to Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, pp. 7–8.

<sup>66</sup> Katzenellenbogen, 'The Representation of the Seven Liberal Arts', p. 60.

<sup>67</sup> Lines 333–34, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 400; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 46.



Everything that, although known to have a divine meaning, is obscured by the façade of nature was an object of interest, a natural question as the title of a treatise by Adelard of Bath (*Quaestiones naturales*) implies.<sup>68</sup> Thus, everything within nature was, by its provenance, imbued with the essence of its divine source. 'There, marked down by the finger of the Supreme Scribe', wrote Bernard Silvestris in his *Cosmographia*, 'can be read the text of time, the fated march of events, the disposition made of the ages'.<sup>69</sup> To Bernard, 'The sky is like a book with its pages spread out plainly, containing the future in secret letters'.<sup>70</sup>

The four arts of the *quadrivium*, merging as 'uno quod initio coeunt et fine' (one at beginning and end), were possessed of unique aqueous qualities akin to those of the *trivium*.<sup>71</sup> Each art was a separate flavour of natural philosophy diverging from the unitary and generative matrix of arithmetic. The river is 'plenus calculorum' (full of counting stones), through which the water flows, providing both nutritive force and a source of the raw materials of mathematical analysis, and a 'plenum vas liquorum' (vessel full of liquids).<sup>72</sup> The use of the word *vas* implies both a vessel and an instrument, thus making the bay of mathematics a meeting of waters and an instrument of all calculation (literally, since it is full of *calculi*) in equal measure. Surrounding the river are crowds of mathematicians playing games and performing arithmetic feats with the stones of the river: it is the abode of scientific enquiry. From this nurturing mathematical confluence, the river then splits, pouring its analytical vigour into the rivers of the three remaining quadrivial arts. In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh claimed that arithmetic was so named from the Greek *ares* (Latin *virtus*) and *rithmus* (*numerus*), making the art the 'power of numbers', namely the fact that all things have been formed in their likeness.<sup>73</sup> The river of

<sup>68</sup> See Adelard of Bath, *Conversations with his Nephew*, trans. by Burnett.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Silvestris, as cited in Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia* II.1.3 as cited in Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages*, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Line 344, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 400; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 47.

<sup>72</sup> 'Ex his primus alueus plenus calculorum, inter quos it murmurans lapsus fluentorum, ut nequeas tollere plenum uas liquorum, nisi simul haurias aliquos eorum' (Of these the first channel is full of pebbles, among which moves the murmuring current of streams, so that you cannot carry a full vessel of fluids unless at the same time you draw out some of them.) Lines 345–48, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 401; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 47.

<sup>73</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, II.7, p. 67.



arithmetic, flowing as it does into every other art, forms a visual, mobile representation of this notion, a *virtus* of number in liquid form.

The river of music flows in procession from that of arithmetic in Godfrey's riverine network, a mathematical art drawn from arithmetic but more profound (*calculosus etiam sed magis profundus*), pushing along 'with a measured and melodious sound' (*cum canore strepitu*). It is imbued with 'delightful taste' (*gustu delectabilis*) and 'pleasant murmurs' (*murmure iocundus*).<sup>74</sup> The river sings with many harmonious chords, presenting the mathematically derived art of musical proportion and beauty. Indeed, Hugh explicitly claims in the *Didascalicon* that music 'takes its name from the word "water", or *aqua* because no euphony, that is, pleasant sound, is possible without moisture'.<sup>75</sup> Flowing forth from the pebble-filled bed of arithmetic, the river of *musica* visually represents the imagined providence of its art through an abstract hydrological model.

Next comes geometry, the river that passes over mountain and valley (*pertransiens ualles et montana*) and measures whatever one likes, including the heights, lengths and planes of the world (*alta, longa, plana*) and all worldly spaces (*spatia mundana*).<sup>76</sup> The spatiality of the river reflects the true role of measurement, to take measure of the world in arithmetically derived dimensions. In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh traces the origins of geometry to a river, claiming that 'this discipline was first discovered by the Egyptians, who, since the Nile in its inundation covered their territories with mud and obscured all boundaries, took to measuring the land with rods and lines'.<sup>77</sup> In a fitting reversal, the entity that gave birth to codified measurement by its spatial obscurantism now serves, in the service of God, as measurer.

<sup>74</sup> 'Calculosus etiam sed magis profundus, cum canore strepitu labitur secundus, gustu delectabilis murmure iocundus, armoniam resonat qualem sonat mundus' (Also mathematical, but more profound, the second stream falls with melodious sound, sweet to the taste, pleasant in its murmuring, it echoes a melody that the earth produces.) Lines 353–56, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 401; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, II.8, p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> 'Inuestigat etiam spatia mundane' (It investigates cosmic space.) Line 371, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 401; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 47. Note that 'cosmic' is a translation of *mundane*, more literally 'pertaining to the world', by both Synan and Feiss, rather than a modern notion of the cosmos as extra-terrestrial space. See Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 420, pertaining to fn 55 on p. 401.

<sup>77</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, II.9, p. 68.

Finally comes astronomy, the greatest of the streams (*quadriuiuium maximus riuorum*), imbued with the waters of all other arts and glittering with the sparkling face of the heavens.<sup>78</sup> The reflective nature of water is deployed to good effect by Godfrey to evoke the trope of a mirrored image of the heavens above doubled through the reflection of a pool of water. This imagery is equally relevant to all of the four rivers, for their purpose is to reflect heavenly mysteries through the mirror of nature. The depths of the waters become a mirror filled with the twinkling of the empyrean realm, launching the imagination from worldly to celestial things and providing a *speculum* of heavenly glory. This image presents a rather different interpretation of the river as a vehicle of mediation; instead of the essence of divine knowledge flowing through the waters of the river, the reflective quality of water appears to present the purity of the stars through its reflective visage.

It was the duty and goal of the quadrivial scholar to penetrate the *integumentum* (outward literal meaning) of nature obscuring the true spiritual causes of Creation. In a peculiar resonance with the previous paragraph, this process *reflects* the divine through the imperfect lens of the natural. For, to the medieval Christian mind, the world was a book of symbols, representing through signification the greatness of its Creator. In the words of Albertus Magnus, 'the work of nature is the work of intelligence' (*opus naturae est opus intelligentiae*).<sup>79</sup> Thus, once the intelligence behind nature was perceived, one was no longer studying worldly things, but the Trinity. Through the piercing of nature's *integumentum*, the four arts of the *quadrivium* lead back to their origin, the headwaters of the *fons philosophiae*. It is from here that all the flows derive, from the broadly infusing flows of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, to the delta of natural philosophy. It is as the pilgrim leaves the strivings of the arts behind that he passes into mysticism, into the realm of things divine. The mastery of the seven arts allows the navigation of the theoretical branch of knowledge, flowing forth from the source into the world but striving to return to heaven. The preceding experiences have prepared him to push through the outward appearance of worldly life, and now he must journey into the heart of philosophy, the realm of theology.

<sup>78</sup> 'Cunctas in se recepit aquas aliorum, Yalina renitet facie celorum' ([...] it receives into itself the waters of all the others. It flashes like the glassy face of the heavens; it shines like the lights fixed in the heavens.) Lines 386–87, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 402; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 48.

<sup>79</sup> Luscombe, *Medieval Thought*, p. 97.

## Theologia, *the Mystical End of Knowledge*

At the passing of the pilgrim from the 'base curriculum' of the seven into the realm of theology and anagogy, he enters the waterscape closest to the source of knowledge. The reader feels that the narrative has crossed an unarticulated and yet powerful barrier between matters mundane and matters divine.<sup>80</sup> Although the practical aspect of knowledge flows throughout the world and permeates material things, the theoretical makes its path back to heaven, carrying the initiate with it. Its esoteric path cannot be followed without the learning granted by all seven of the liberal arts, but its descent into the hidden causes of the material world allows a contact point between human knowledge and the divine. Just as Christ descended into the world and returned to heaven upon his crucifixion, so too does the river of theology flow into the landscape of human knowledge only to reverse its flow — miraculously — back to the heights from which it originated (*in altis refluit quo est oriunda*).<sup>81</sup> As Godfrey puts it, the river comes to the needy to remind them of heavenly bliss before their death:

Nam de summo profluens ad nos deriuatur, Et uiator ambulans ne premoriatur.  
Interim uiaticum fesso ministratur; Hic eo reficior illic ero satur.

(Flowing down from on high [the river] reaches us, so that the pilgrim who is walking will not die prematurely; when he becomes tired provisions are supplied. Here I am refreshed by it; there I will be fully satisfied.)<sup>82</sup>

The process of Godfrey's riverine and pedagogical mapping of a liberal arts *techné* begins to lead to a mystical vision of perfection. The most apt analogy would be to compare this transition to that in the *Paradiso* of Dante Alighieri between purgatory and the celestial heavens. Practice leads to divine insight, knowledge leads to mystical glimpses of what is above at the source: this, for a Victorine, was the purpose of liberal arts school learning. Like Dante's pilgrim, exploration of the ascent to knowledge and exploration of its manifold topographical and human features allow a vision of divine inexpressibility and perfection. The language of anagogy

<sup>80</sup> It is especially significant to note that, through the mystical valence given to the *quadri-vium*, we gain a glimpse into Godfrey's associative memory and imagination, a very useful insight for intellectual history purposes.

<sup>81</sup> Line 480, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 405; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> Lines 473–76, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 404; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 51.

begins to enter the *Fons philosophiae* in the form of fluid quiescence, tranquillity, and ascendancy as the pilgrim follows the river back to the heavens. The pilgrim begins to glimpse the rarefied top of the *mons philosophiae*, the heights of moral 'gravity' and apex of the moral vertical axis. This is particularly apparent in the description of the river of theology, the ascendant theoretical art enabled by the practical quadrivial arts:

Quod in altum nititur labitur quiete, Cuius aque munde sunt semite secrete; His  
insistent quibus sunt res mundane sprete, Quibus celi sepius exceduntur mete.

(The stream that arises on the heights flows quietly. Its waters are pure, its ways are hidden. On them those who spurn earthly things concentrate; they often exceed the limits of heaven.)<sup>83</sup>

At this point, the pilgrim reaches the apex of his journey, experiencing the compressed singularity of the unitary source at close proximity. The realm of theology, like the quiescent space of the heavenly Jerusalem, is simpler and yet purer and more esoteric than that which precedes it in the poem. Through the mediation of the river, the reader apprehends that there are many paths by which this purity and unity pass from heavenly space into temporal space and, through a miraculous reversal, back again. If the poem begins with an understanding of the lofty heights of the mountain brought on by the experience of the senses, then the view down from the heights enables a sense of how the river system, and thus knowledge, are interrelated. It is here that the lofty source of theology emerges, only reachable by the chosen few:

Namque caput altius fert theologia, et ad Deum peruenit celsiore uia; per hanc soli  
celibes enituntur quia, rara sapientia ueraque Sophia.

(For theology carries its head higher and reaches towards God by a higher way. Through this way only the celibate strive upward, because it is rare and true wisdom.)<sup>84</sup>

Following the straight road of theology, the Pilgrim passed from history into the higher mysteries, finally apprehending the nature of the *Fons philosophiae* with a revelatory clarity. This journey, as Godfrey presents it, is for the celibate alone, the fruits of an observant, scholarly, and spiritual life. The headwaters of the Seven Lib-

<sup>83</sup> Lines 317–20, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 400; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> Lines 321–24, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 400; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 46.

eral Arts are found in philosophy — characterized by Godfrey as the umbrella term for the sum total of the arts — and the highest part of this is theology. In the words of Adolf Katzenellenbogen, the liberal arts ‘were essential and, to most thinking until the Age of Scholasticism, sufficient for the ascension to the higher intellectual endeavours, which were the understanding of philosophy (especially sacred philosophy) and, through the reading of God’s works in the world at large, the understanding of theology, the highest of man’s intellectual attainments’.<sup>85</sup>

Here, at the heights of spiritual achievement, engineering works are ongoing. The great doctors of the church are the bridge-builders — Ambrose sits at the head of the bridge; Jerome watches over it together with his monks. They have created the path by which the pilgrim can cross the river into new territories. Augustine can be found in the middle of the bridge, for ‘Nil in hoc scientie nil uirtutis minus: Exploratos fluminis omnes habet sinus’ (in him there is no lack of knowledge or of virtue; he has explored all the bends of the river).<sup>86</sup> He mediates the thoroughfare to salvation, encouraging the needy, rebuking the rebellious, and pouring forth draughts of knowledge from ‘innumerable water jugs’.<sup>87</sup> It is here that the exegetes and expositors of Scripture have provided a path by which all can cross the inscrutable waters of the Old and New Testaments.

It is interesting to note the absence of certain elements from the poem. Although the image is busy with activity, the broader landscape is abstracted and strangely washed out. There is life along the banks, but the image-making does not extend into the hinterlands, as it were. There is no commerce or details of natural life — fish, mills, boats, reeds, or water plants — only the waters of knowledge and those who seek to exploit them. There is a great deal of social activity as the pilgrim passes the opposing banks of the Old Testament — a scene of ritualistic sacrifices of cattle, the smell of goat entrails, and the unclean rites of pre-Mosaic civilization — and the New Testament — a clean and pure scene of baptism, eucharist, and devout prayer — but they represent a world of ritual divorced from the society that sustains them.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Katzenellenbogen, ‘The Representation of the Seven Liberal Arts’, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> Lines 703–04, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 411; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 59.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Hic innumerabiles sapidum liquoris. Plenas habet hydrias, uariique saporis’ (This man has innumerable water jugs full of tasty drinks with various flavours.) Lines 705–06, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 412; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> Lines 549–60, 613–24, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, pp. 407, 409; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, pp. 54, 57.

Life exists along the banks, but it is the accumulated sediment of Scripture clinging to theology as it returns to the unknowable, the social images that draws the mind to the divine through exegetic interpretation; it is not *about* its literal content. Parts of the vision are empty because they are not relevant to Godfrey's vision of the liberal arts. The *Fons philosophiae* is strangely sanitized of environmental imagery beyond the aqueous, despite its symbiotic dependence on an extensive understanding of riparian phenomena on the part of the reader. This is the riddle of the method of loci: it must be detailed, but can never be complete. It contains only what is placed into it by the mind. For the Victorine, this is only what is pedagogically relevant.

The pilgrim marches on, ignoring these *lacunae* and focusing only on the string of tropes that punctuate riparian life. In the middle of all this intellectual activity, Godfrey is careful to point out 'at exemplis alii grandibus accensi. Semitam preambuli pergunt inoffensi' (others, fired by great examples, [who] walk ahead and proceed unhindered along the path).<sup>89</sup> These determined pilgrims are, unsurprisingly, canons regular. As the narrative of the poem passes beyond learning and into truly mystic contemplation of the Trinity — the point at which the pilgrim fords the river of Scripture on the bridge built by the Church — it is clear that the Victorine reader is to feel that theirs is a privileged path, that their toils have led them to this point. Others have been dismissed as inadequate and the Victorine is supreme.<sup>90</sup> Monastic thought existed to experience propinquity with the divine through regulated spiritual practice, and Godfrey's pilgrim, through his journey, has reached the geographical equivalent of this experience at the top of a mountain.

It is at this point where the reader gains an intriguing glimpse into the self-perceived world of monastic privilege. The wielding of knowledge is rendered in poetry (itself a wielding of literate knowledge) as an act of hydraulic engineering, with the great and the good of Christian learning preparing the way, building the bridges, providing instructions in which waters to drink and which to shun. The Victorine is to be considered a specially privileged class within this landscape, knowing how, why, and where to travel. Theology overcomes gravity, and the river points the way back to the Trinity. It is at this point that the monastic strides confidently forward where weaker minds might falter. They know the Good that they must seek and feel the calling behind the *integumentum* of worldly knowledge. In

<sup>89</sup> Lines 741–42, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 413; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> See Godfrey's critique of his contemporaries at lines 245–96, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, pp 397–99; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, pp. 43–45.

the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the question ‘*For what reason has a rational creature been made?*’ is partially answered as follows:

[B]ecause one cannot prevail to exist as a sharer of His Beatitude, except through intelligence, which as much as It understands more, so much is It more fully had; God made the rational creature, which would understand the Most High Good and by understanding love (It) and by loving possess (It), and by possessing enjoy (It).<sup>91</sup>

Thus, the human being was *preconditioned* to seek out the source of love and enjoyment embodied in God as a condition of its very existence: indeed, it was its reason for existing. Peter continues as follows: ‘And if there is asked, “For what has the rational creature been created?” one responds: “To praise God, to serve him, (and) to enjoy Him”’.<sup>92</sup> God was quite literally the only knowledge for humanity, and all other things were to serve only as vehicles of knowledge, and not an object of knowledge in themselves.<sup>93</sup> Godfrey outlines not only the universal salvation message, but also the privileged role of monastics in this schema.<sup>94</sup>

The image of the fountainhead presented in the *Fons philosophiae* perpetuates Lombard’s rational seeking out and enjoyment of God; the intellectual quest of the narrative is motivated by a thirst aroused by the Holy Spirit, the motivation for the pursuit of knowledge, and the apprehension of knowledge enables understanding of the Good. Knowledge of the Good, in turn, leads to a delectable vision of — or imbibing from — the fountainhead itself, the concentrated divine essence. The river of salvation inevitably pours back through time towards the heavenly kingdom, bringing the pilgrim to a vision of a New Jerusalem, a blessed city situated on the banks of a sacred river.<sup>95</sup> This is fitting, for the Apocalypse comes at the end of the Bible and represents the culmination of salvation and scriptural time, the end of turbulence. Thus, through the realization of correct exegesis, the spiritual

<sup>91</sup> Peter Lombard, *Second Book of Sentences*, trans. by Bugnolo, I.II.IV.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Lombard, *Second Book of Sentences*, trans. by Bugnolo, I.II.IV.

<sup>93</sup> In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine distinguishes between *uti* and *frui*, things ‘to be used’ and things ‘to be enjoyed’. Only divine things are to be enjoyed, the rest to be used. See 1.7–12, cited in Green, *On Christian Teaching*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Peter of Celle speculates on the unique spiritual strengths of monastics, as discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Est ad huius fluminis alueum fundata, Inclita Ierusalem ciuitas beata’ (Founded at the bed of this river is Jerusalem, the blessed city.) Lines 497–98, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, ‘*The Fountain of Philosophy*’, trans. by Feiss, p. 405; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 52.



pilgrim may share in this superlative principle in space and time, or more precisely, *outside* or *beyond* space and time. The narrative of the *Fons philosophiae* enters the kingdom of Christ the Son, passing out of history and into the realm eternal, in which it encounters the fountainhead.

For humanity, time within the Christian salvation narrative tied all things together, linking it to a broader arc of spiritual progress. Within the *Fons philosophiae*, the 'hydrological cycle' of Godfrey's schema bridged two powerful temporal and spiritual loci: the beginning of human history and end of perfect knowledge within the Garden of Eden, and the resolution of time and knowledge alike outside of time at the coming of the New Jerusalem. In between these two points, the whole of human intellectual pursuit and the entirety of biblical history were laid bare. Time has long been equated with a river flowing from origin to destination, and Godfrey's river traces the course of history and of knowledge in equal measure. The river is history, for the order of things stems from an unfolding of God's design within the temporality of Creation. The river is knowledge, for the cause and end of knowledge pour forth as a flow of water does from God, and returns to Him via the inspiration of human minds by the power of the Holy Spirit and the theological striving enabled by the liberal arts. The narrative, like salvation itself, is an exile and return story of water descending naturally, and then returning unnaturally.

The fountain represents both the pilgrim's journey through life and a kind of pilgrimage back through time to the original Creation. Knowledge comes forth from one source — through Creation — and returns through another — Salvation. Simultaneously, the narrative flows into the anagogical realm — extant as a universal without change or flaw. The river defies nature to flow back to its source, just as the learning of theology reverses the natural order of things. The river of the heavenly Jerusalem flows from the divine, into knowledge, and back to the divine through typology, appearing throughout the New and Old Testaments in the form of diverse miracles back to the creation of the universe, the moment at which the four rivers spring from the primordial paradise.

Labitur per medium ciuitatis riuus, nullo quidem strepitu sed effectui uiuus, omnis efficaciter morbi sanatiuus, et ipsius etiam mortis expulsiuus.

(A stream flows through the middle of the city, without noise but lively in effect, an effective cure for every illness; it even drives out death itself.)<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Lines 525–28, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, p. 406; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 53.



Reminiscent of the vision of John the Divine in Revelation, the passage above brings the journey to the headwaters of knowledge, to a locus that exists out of space and out of time, waiting in potential for the Day of Judgement. It is, in effect, the realization of water symbolism; it is a perfect river from which all others flow, demarcating the boundary between this life and the next, between perfection and imperfection, and between the finite and the infinite. It is the last frontier of the changeable world, the point at which the human passes into eternity.

The essence of divinity, symbolized by the waters of eternal life, flows through the city at the culmination of Christian universal history, tying the highest locus of salvation history, via symbolism, to every river, every sea, every lake, and every spring. This is, to my mind, the strongest anagogical water symbolism within the poem, for it refers directly to the Last Things, linking the spiritual experience of Godfrey directly to the final apotheosis of humanity or, more specifically, to the negation of mortality and beginning of everlasting life.

While progressing ever upwards through a continuum of perfection, the waters of the *Fons philosophiae* have become increasingly silent and tranquil, as if the very noise of the river represents the chaos and division of worldly knowledge. Within the realm of the spirit, the waters are stilled and their effect is intensified. The chaotic burbling of the river does not belong in this realm, where all is still, tranquil and perfected. In Revelation, the end of the world is accompanied by the passage 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea'.<sup>97</sup> The primordial chaos of the waters has subsided, and only a pure stream of divine consciousness remains. Parent of all water, this river flows from the throne of Christ and the Lamb. It is within this undivided and tranquil state that the essence of divinity may be truly felt, rendered within the *Fons philosophiae* as the waters from which all other waters spring:

Unus hic pre ceteris haustus est divinus, usu quidem notior intellectu minus,  
quem nec totum caperet mentis mee sinus: scilicet quod unus est Deus atque trinus.

(Here one drink is more sacred than the rest, known more by experience [*usu*]  
and less by understanding. The capacity of my mind does not grasp it completely:  
namely, that God is one and three.)<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Revelation 21. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Lines 785–88, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 414; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 62.

Once tasted, the waters of the divine river impart spiritual truth. When drinking from the fountainhead of divinity, Godfrey feels the full essence of Christ and of the Trinity. Intellect is useless in comprehending these mysteries, for such truths require one to *feel* the truth, rather than think it. In the final section of the poem, the pilgrim is exposed to the full providence of the divine essence, filled with knowledge like a cup brimming over, the 'well springing up into eternal life'. The 'body' of the Pilgrim, an allegorical representation of the spirit, has moved beyond liberal arts learning towards the theological *telos* of learning, for which Godfrey had boundless enthusiasm.<sup>99</sup>

Water, by virtue of its symbolic relationship with thought, serves as an ideal representative of the principles present within the medieval imagination of anagogy. The rivers of Genesis, once released from the garden's fountain, spread out through history like a watershed of twisted consciousness. These rivers were dammed, poisoned, navigated, and cultivated by humanity, yet these functions belonged to an intermediate stage in the vast arc of salvation history. Once human nature had been perfected and the temporal world had passed away, the very same river that poured from the garden flowed through the heavenly Jerusalem. Water carries the history of humanity to its resolution with an inexorable power, its fluvial might representing the possibility of salvation through Victorine celibacy, piety, and learning. This dynamic is followed scrupulously within the *Fons philosophiae*, culminating in a draught from the perfected river of human knowledge, from which the drinker gains a correspondingly perfect experience of the Supreme Good.

Hinc infusum patulo gutturis hyatu, Transglutire maximo studiui conatu, Sed hoc nullo ratio quivit apparatu, Donec fides affuit suo famulatu.

(I tried with the greatest effort to swallow what was poured into my gaping mouth, but reason could not do so by any means, until faith was there with its help.)<sup>100</sup>

The force and providence of this flow overwhelm the rational faculties of the soul, washing away the old and imperfect human form. Like the divinely mandated Flood of Genesis, this overflowing overwhelms and renews, bringing about the conditions needed for salvation in the form of knowledge. More specifically, the message of a distinctly human salvation is shared with the heart. The doctrine of the Church on earth taught the story of Christian salvation, yet only through a true

<sup>99</sup> Feiss's introduction to Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 384.

<sup>100</sup> Lines 789–92, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, '*The Fountain of Philosophy*', trans. by Feiss, p. 414; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, p. 62.

experience of divinity could one truly *understand*. According to Augustine, 'Ideas are archetypal forms, stable and immutable essences of things, not created but eternally and unchangeably existent within the divine intellect'.<sup>101</sup> Thus, to understand that which was perfect and unchanging within knowledge (an end that would be the envy of most epistemologies), one must seek out a vision of these universals, these archetypes. In the final seven stanzas of the poem, Godfrey catalogues the truth 'absorbed' by spiritual osmosis from the waters of divinity, describing the historical and soteriological reality at the core of the Christian faith, welling from the *Fons philosophiae* through divine mandate. In the final stanzas of the poem, the lessons learned from imbibing the draught of divine knowledge focus on the life of Christ, love for humanity, the mode of Creation, the Fall, the Crucifixion, and the doctrines of salvation.<sup>102</sup> This is the point of emanation, the very heart of the poem.

The end of the poem, the overwhelming spiritual source of the *Fons philosophiae*, provides a vision of divine reality couched in the form of a mystical revelation. In the *Vita prima* of William of Auxerre, an anecdote is told regarding the great Bernard of Clairvaux. According to William, 'he once confessed that when meditating or praying, the whole sacred Scripture appeared as if placed and explained beneath him'.<sup>103</sup> The pilgrim of Godfrey's *Fons philosophiae* is similarly presented with a holistic vision of the 'modes of creation'. Awareness of context is the most profound gift of divine revelation, a feeling of profundity and an ascendent perception of how Creation 'fits together'. To some extent, it is a brief glimpse into the mind of God that, although imperfect, represents the culmination of Supreme Good. Apotheosis is impossible for the human race within this world, yet through divine intervention, the mind may climb to a spiritual summit and behold a glorious vision. It is at this perceptive locus that the fountain resides, from which the pilgrim may look back for an elevated glimpse of all that lies before him.

<sup>101</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, XLVI.2, as cited in Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 159.

<sup>102</sup> Lines 793–836, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, 'The Fountain of Philosophy', trans. by Feiss, pp. 414–16; Godfrey of Saint-Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, ed. by Michaud-Quantin, pp. 63–64. This ending is particularly relevant to the treatises thought to follow the *Fons philosophiae*: the *Anathomia corporis Christi* (dissection of the body of Christ) and *De spirituale corpore Christi* (on the spiritual body of Christ). The source of the *Fons*, Christ and the Trinity, leads the reader into a detailed discussion of Christ as corporeal and spiritual.

<sup>103</sup> Bruun, *Parables*, p. 30.

### *Conclusion: The Fons Philosophiae as a Pedagogical Hydrology*

By following the narrative, we can see the didactic purpose of the *Fons philosophiae*: an embedding of knowledge into a riverine structure.<sup>104</sup> The structure of the poem leads us through a complete course of knowledge previously walked by Godfrey. It outlines his life and the revelations gained from his studies in the Abbey of Saint-Victor, and yet it overtly attempts to instruct the novice in the subtleties of this path. The poem is a personal narrative that reflects and constructs a model of self, a didactic narrative that constructs a set of desirable revelations in a mnemotechnical schema, and a salvation narrative tracking the course of the human soul through a spiritual ascent and back into the heights. It is a cosmological narrative that maps out the great *macrocosmos* and the *microcosmos* of the human body, a philosophical primer that instructs in the *auctores*, and a satirical piece that lampoons those thinkers with whom Godfrey disagrees. All of these qualities are embedded in, and enabled by, the structure of the river. More than a biblical allegory or an exegetic device, the hydrological abstraction that resides within the *Fons philosophiae* is a structural articulation of Victorine — and to some extent twelfth-century — knowledge through a familiar aqueous material image.

Through the *Fons philosophiae* and the stylistic and structural conceits of Godfrey of Saint-Victor, this chapter has sought to achieve a triple goal. First, it brings new critical attention to a text and author that have received little attention within discourse on the twelfth century. Secondly, it explores the form of the poem as a unique expression of natural imagery, its structural logic linked to hidden interconnections and forces within monastic and broader medieval thought. Finally, it visualizes the hidden processes of medieval metaphysics and hermeneutics, albeit through the prism of a single text and author, demonstrating both the visualization of the invisible and the putative structure of thought with great clarity.

Once composed, the riverine structure of the poem exerts a form of agency. Material imagery and didactic content merge; we apprehend an abstract hydrology in which the poem is shaped, and in turn shapes, the reader. The river flowing forth from the fountain of philosophy is not simply a trope or a throwaway image, but a dynamic, self-contained, historically embedded manifestation of a Victorine

<sup>104</sup> Although, as Juanita Feros Ruys points out, it may be more accurate to argue that all medieval literature is inextricably didactic. Ruys's working description of didacticism as 'a text designed to teach, instruct, advise, edify, inculcate morals, or modify and regulate behaviour' is applicable to Peter of Celle's letters and the *Descriptio*, and yet the *Fons philosophiae* is the most explicitly so. See Ruys, 'Introduction: Approaches to Didactic Literature', p. 5.

episteme in aqueous form. Just as a waterscape in the world beyond the text is part of a complex web of interactions between human, water, and the entirety of a vast ecological web, so too is this abstraction both subject to human interpretation and possessed of the ability to influence the interpreter. The use of the word 'influence' is more than incidental, for the river of the *Fons philosophiae* does in some sense flow into the mind of the reader, spreading forth from its origins to provide a moveable, dynamic manifestation of knowledge in all of its potency, variability, nutritive power, and structural eloquence.

The force of the narrative follows the flow of a river, equating the natural motion of water obeying the laws of gravity with the impetus of knowledge obeying the Neoplatonic principles under which it emanates from the Trinity. The contemplation of the source of the water, the seeking of the mystery behind the seemingly endless providence of water, denotes an ever-ascending mystical contemplation catalysed by liberal arts learning. Before the summits of philosophy could be reached, the discerning traveller on the road to knowledge had to learn not to be tempted by the illusion of depth within worldly things. In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh claims that nature is 'an artificer fire coming forth from a certain power to beget sensible objects'.<sup>105</sup>

The *Fons philosophiae* flows with the force of a hidden reality, shaped into a coherent poetics through the labour of the poet. It is an act of literary artifice that brings forth something of the structural reality of Victorine knowledge through another forging, that of divine reality into the natural imagery of the river. It shepherds the reader through a difficult transition, from the very academic and comprehensible labours of the liberal arts to the unknowable but spiritually intuitable revelations of theology. Thus, the poem is in some sense a shaping of natural matter shaped in turn by the hammer of the Creator.

Like the medieval understanding of knowledge itself, the river of the poem is both natural and unnatural. It enters the world through gravity, splitting and dividing into diverse *artes*, each with their own qualities. Once their secrets have been mastered, however, it is possible for the spiritual mind to follow a river that flows against nature, returning to heaven. The poem may seem to have a cavalier disregard for fluid dynamics, but it is more accurate to say that its disregard of water's natural flow is a reflection of a powerful belief that salvation achieves the impossible. It reverses original sin, guides the mind back to heaven, returns the soul to heaven after death. Theology is only comprehensible through the Seven Liberal Arts and performs the greatest mercy of all by flowing into the world

<sup>105</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. by Taylor, I.10, p. 57.

— entering the human realms of knowledge, and then leaving again, drawing the mind with it.

What bearing, then, does the fluvial structure of the *Fons philosophiae* have on wider readings of hydrological abstraction in other monastic texts? To my mind, the most immediate answer to this question is the refutation of the notion that the use of water — or indeed any ecological imagery — in medieval texts is an arbitrary evocation of tropes and idioms. I end this chapter by proposing that Godfrey demonstrates a strong sense of the flexible and capacious nature of hydrological imagery, albeit framed in a strong legacy of pre-scholastic and scholastic thought. The flexible imagery of water and its structural traits demonstrate a medieval technique of visualization that links visible to invisible abstraction. Furthermore, the *Fons philosophiae* shapes an aqueous structure and poetics expressing something of the hidden mystical space thought by the Victorines to bridge the gap between things human and divine. Through this structure and by means of these poetics, the poem uses the eloquence of nature, the agency of the visual efficacy of water to come alive within the mind of the reader, to shape them as it was shaped, to teach them as Godfrey was taught. All of this is made possible through a language of hydrology beyond metaphor and beyond words.



Figure 6. 'British Library Manuscript Arundel 44, Exegesis on the Parable of the Sower (Conrad of Hirsau, *Speculum Virginum*)', London, British Library, MS Arundel 44, fol. 70r. Second or third quarter of the twelfth century. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.



‘YOUR PEN POURED FORTH GOOD WORDS’:  
LIQUID MODELS IN THE EPISTOLARY STYLE OF  
PETER OF CELLE

The language of hydrology had manifold effects within the monastic imagination. In the poetic logic of the *Fons philosophiae*, the structure of a river system came to represent the entirety of education. In the chapter to follow, this method is fragmented into smaller units of rhetorical expression, uniquely adapted to the brevity of letter-based communication. The potency of a complex abstract landscape enabled the flow of meaning between the scattered members of the monastic community, whether in a personal missive from individual to individual or a sharing of spiritual wisdom from one to many. This chapter studies the correspondence of Peter of Celle, Benedictine, master of scriptural exegesis and complex allegory, profuse letter writer, and incorrigible borrower of hydrological imagery. Peter, through his letters, patterned and walked through a complex landscape of his own, inviting his readers to follow in his footsteps.

In the title passage of this chapter, Peter begins a letter with a small but effective touch of fluid language. To Richard of Salisbury, he writes ‘De uase siquidem bono et optimo eructauit stilus tuus uerba bona’ (your pen poured forth good words from a good and excellent vessel).<sup>1</sup> Like ink from a quill, like water from a vessel,

<sup>1</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 166, to Richard of Salisbury, pp. 642–45.



the act of writing is linked not only to the flow of a stream, but to the whole river system of knowledge and spiritual wisdom. The pen, through this flow, pours forth eloquence enabled by the rhetorical and grammatical arts, offering a link to a wider world of meaning only glimpsed, but imagined through association. At this link between human artifice and a wider ecology of meaning, a simple sentence becomes suggestive of a complex metaphor for knowledge.

Peter of Celle was a twelfth-century Benedictine abbot with many facets to his persona: correspondence enthusiast, author of many treatises and letters, and ecclesiast of great repute. His corpus has garnered interest due to the richness of historical and social detail found within.<sup>2</sup> Peter has also been studied for his skilful writing: both Jean Leclercq and Mary Carruthers, the former inspiring the latter, have explored and admired his rhetorical style, his allegorical vocabulary, and the vivid depiction of his ideas.<sup>3</sup> A man who knew the great and the good of his era and maintained prolific communication with them, Peter has gained recognition for the same skill that also motivates this chapter: the complexity of his figurative evocations. Leclercq, a fellow Benedictine, was drawn to his medieval forebear by the complexity of his monastic ideas and the eloquence with which he expressed them. Carruthers, a scholar of memory and image-making, was drawn to the power of his mnemotechnics and evocation of a spiritual landscape.<sup>4</sup> Peter demonstrated a spatial awareness of the waters of knowledge in his letters, and, through their flow,

<sup>2</sup> Peter's letters were first edited in nine books in 1613 by J. Sirmond, and reprinted by Dom Janvier in a collection of Peter's works. Sirmond's edition was later included by Migne in the *Patrologia Latina*. The current and definitive collection, collated from a variety of sources, is the product of Julian Haseldine in *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, a compilation of letters with the Latin and facing English translation. It is Haseldine's edition that provides the material for this chapter, unless otherwise indicated. Prior to the release of his Oxford edition of the letters, Haseldine catalogued the process of compiling Peter's corpus in meticulous detail in his 'The Creation of a Literary Memorial'.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Leclercq collated and transcribed the Latin of Peter's corpus in *La Spiritualité de Pierre de Celle* together with a valuable commentary. Hugh Feiss translated the Leclercq edition into English in *Peter of Celle: Selected Works*, with further commentary. Mary Carruthers made use of both the original Latin and the Feiss translation in *The Craft of Thought*.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Carruthers has described his style as 'couched in the commonplace tropes of meditative reading which include [...] the language of educated *memoria*'. In *The Craft of Thought*, Carruthers devotes a case study to the mnemotechnical aesthetics of Peter. See also the article 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument'. This reading, enclosed as it is within such a seminal work, provides invaluable connections between Peter's thought and Carruthers's broader methodology in *The Craft of Thought*, p. 108.

gave and received spiritual nourishment. And so in a letter to Hugh of Cluny, Peter delves deep into a shared intellectual space, delighting in its treasures and sating the thirst of his heart: 'Proinde exulto ad dignationem uestram, stupeo ad eloquentiam, curro sicut ceruus sitiens ad fontes historiarum, ad profunditatem sententiarum, ad suauitatem exhortationem' (Thus I rejoice at your worthiness, I am amazed at your eloquence, I run like the thirsty deer to the fountains of knowledge, to the deep well of thoughts, to the sweetness of exhortations.)<sup>5</sup> Playing upon the wording of Psalm 41. 2, there is evidence of a desire for religious expression and of the reception of learned ideas. The river that flows between ideas connects thinkers through a network of associations. As in the *Fons philosophiae*, the thirst for divine knowledge motivates both inspiration in the writing of and edification in the receipt of a letter. In the landscape of letters, water is both local and personal — the monastery fountain, the millpond, the *lavatorium* — and yet evokes something grander and more far reaching — the rivers of paradise, the tropes of Scripture, the flow of waters from Eden to Jerusalem. The small-scale spaces of human interaction mirror the little things within intellectual life: inner contemplation, small works of spiritual toil, personal and domestic life. These, like all sources of water, ultimately link to the grand narratives of Christian moral life: eschatology, salvation history, the universality of Christ's teachings.

On the level of energy, we can see both the construction of a complex hydraulic system and the building of an equally complex spiritual and intellectual abstraction as 'energy-intensive' tasks. It took the application of labour to create both, and a source of energy. For water systems, the labour was that of monks and craftsmen, and the source of power was kinetic — the flow of the water converted into mechanical energy through the water wheel, or applied as a delivery system for gravity-flow water systems. For spiritual systems, a craftsman was still required. In an allegory that may seem convoluted to the reader but would be extremely comfortable for a medieval monk, the design was akin to that exhibited by Godfrey of Saint-Victor when creating his poem or Hugh when he shaped spiritual structures from the raw material of theology — the conversion of potential spiritual energy into a form of 'mechanics' powering the inner workings of the soul, setting the intricate mechanisms of monastic life in motion. The process of channelling and mediating the essence of Eden into the quotidian life of the monastic community was a form of spiritual engineering as great as, and co-dependent with, the motions of medieval hydraulics.

<sup>5</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 32, to Hugh of Cluny, pp. 120–21.

Water, like the endlessly intertwined tropes of small- and large-scale moral life, bridges scale. Within spiritual life, it bridged the divine and the human. In the realm of technology, it brought the inaccessible water source into a controlled and useful context. The intellectual application of ‘management’ to water brought about a communication of meaning across a gulf of understanding. Within monastic letters, we apprehend the ability of water to illuminate not only grand macro-cosmic details and spatially extended hydrologies, but also small glimpses of ideas flowing past. It reveals focused evocations of larger interconnections for a single point, the infusion of water into the language of the everyday, the personal, and the social. Peter, through the evocation of landscape imagery, paints a picture of spirituality through what Carruthers describes as ‘a sight-seeing pilgrimage’, playing with ‘variations of tempo and mood, the *colores* of the journey determined in each site’.<sup>6</sup> Like a pilgrimage, the journey was both an exposure to a variety of sites of spiritual meaning and a structured itinerary with didactic intent.

Peter’s aqueous rhetoric fits into what Tim Ingold terms reading and writing as ‘modalities of travel’, a tradition within a broader category of mind-walking. When viewed in this light, Peter and his correspondents participate in a collective self-imagining of monks as ‘wayfarers, travelling in their minds from place to place, and composing their thoughts as they went along’. This process ‘pulls in’ ideas of places already visited, shaping an abstraction from prior experience.<sup>7</sup> The landscape in which Peter’s mind walks is ecological, its aqueous elements forming an interconnected waterscape. By briefly alluding to the broader context of this letter-world, Peter can reveal an entire world of imagery and meaning densely encapsulated in a short rhetorical flourish. There is an experimental quality to his words, as if each new vista is as new to him as it is to the reader, and as if his thoughts are not complete, but still unfolding. Medieval letter writing is often discussed in terms of its structure — the age-old conventions of rhetoric and the ever-evolving *ars dictaminis* — and yet it is important to see it as an act of spontaneity, even if this initial act has been curated for added effect, and memorialized for future reference.

It is especially important to understand that the use of water as a structural entity within medieval intellectual culture did not need to be designed as an all-inclusive schema such as that devised by Godfrey of Saint-Victor in the *Fons philosophiae*, but could also emerge as a rhetorical gloss layered on other meanings. By cumulatively building a system of aqueous images within a body of writing — in this case a corpus of letters — the letter writer and a community of readers could touch upon

<sup>6</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 198.

materiality, Scripture, and spatial metaphor to visualize the flow of ideas between them. It was a visual representation of the network that joined them across space and time, an aqueous mapping of the twelfth-century monastic community of letters. The *ars dictaminis* merged with other rhetorical techniques discussed within this work to trace these pathways, and the substantial body of letters that come to us from Peter of Celle is a particularly fine — and cumulative — example.

### *Peter of Celle and His Letters*

Peter of Celle (c. 1115–c. 1183) was abbot of Montier-la-Celle (by c. 1145) and bishop of Chartres (c. 1181).<sup>8</sup> Born at Aunoy-les Minimes to a Champenois family of the lesser nobility, Peter is thought to have been a monk for some time at the Benedictine monasteries of Saint-Martin-des-Champs and Montier-la-Celle — former home of Robert of Molesmes, founder of Cîteaux — before becoming abbot of the latter.<sup>9</sup> Peter later became abbot of Saint Remi de Rheims from 1162 to 1181 and succeeded John of Salisbury as bishop of Chartres for the last years of his life.<sup>10</sup> Unable to attend the Third Lateran Council due to ill health, Peter was denied the opportunity to become a cardinal despite being described in a letter of nomination to Alexander III as 'by far outstanding among the other abbots of [his] land'.<sup>11</sup> Peter was a regular correspondent of many of the key church figures of his age, including Peter the Venerable, Hugh of Cluny, Thomas Becket, and the brothers John and Richard of Salisbury. He was an enthusiastic supporter and correspondent of both the Cistercian community of Clairvaux and the Carthusian priory of Mont-Dieu.<sup>12</sup>

A blend of monk and church magnate, Peter demonstrates a mix of priorities in his writing. Described by Ronald Pepin as 'a pious man of glad temperament whose interests were never far removed from religious concerns', Peter gravitated between scorn for worldly affairs and a manifest enjoyment of his literary

<sup>8</sup> Haseldine's introduction to Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, p. xxix.

<sup>9</sup> Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument', p. 3; Feiss's introduction to Peter of Celle, *Peter of Celle: Selected Works*, trans. by Feiss, p. 1; Haseldine's introduction to Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, pp. xxx–xxxi.

<sup>10</sup> Bibliographical notes in Thomas Becket, *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. by Duggan, p. 1381.

<sup>11</sup> Feiss's introduction to Peter of Celle, *Peter of Celle: Selected Works*, trans. by Feiss, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument', p. 3.

friendships.<sup>13</sup> The fame of Peter in monastic circles is attested by Nicolas of Clairvaux, who, in a rapt letter, exclaimed that '[b]efore I set eyes upon you, I loved you, and the basis of the love was the testimony to your piety, which I heard of from religious men'.<sup>14</sup> His network of correspondents was extensive, spanning northern France and southern England and imparting a sense of spiritual friendship with many of the contemporary intellectual elite.<sup>15</sup> For Peter, McGuire writes, 'friendship, family and monastery were all bound up in each other'.<sup>16</sup> If we read the letters as a collective expression of Peter's mental modelling, nodes of solidarity and bonds of amity and authority are the flexible framework.

In contrast to the more concise style of his official correspondence, Peter's personal missives are somewhat turgid, highly figurative, prolix, and often cryptic.<sup>17</sup> Julian Haseldine describes some sections of the letters as 'strings of quotations and allusions [that] run together and rise in a crescendo of biblical vocabulary to create a sort of scriptural compendium on the theme or subject matter at hand'.<sup>18</sup> Carruthers remarks upon the 'sheer volume of lumber in [Peter's] memory' and his willingness to gather it together in such a great concentration without editing.<sup>19</sup> This complexity stems not from bombast, but from the evocation of complex thought-worlds through the practice of the rhetorical arts. Haseldine sees the letters as a 'literary memorial', a curation of selfhood for edification and for posterity:

What these collections [...] present, to contemporaries and to posterity alike, is a controlled and selective image of the author, a distinctive literary persona. This was typically built around a number of themes which portray the author in his or her chosen light.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Pepin, '*Amicitia jocosa*', pp. 140–41.

<sup>14</sup> Haseldine, 'Understanding the Language of *amicitia*', p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> By 'friendship', as Haseldine points out, we should understand a wider network of political and social ties than can be encapsulated by the modern use of the word. Haseldine, 'Understanding the Language of *amicitia*', pp. 239–41.

<sup>16</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, p. 271.

<sup>17</sup> Although turgor is often taken as a synonym for grandiloquence, its material imagery presents another story. Turgor is a swelling beneath the surface, a distension caused by a hidden build-up of fluid. This can be seen as a positive quality in medieval thought: the swelling of meaning within a contained vessel. Furthermore, turgor is a distinctly fluid swelling, suggesting the possibility of a bursting forth upon the release of pressure.

<sup>18</sup> Haseldine's introduction to Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, p. xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> Haseldine, 'The Creation of a Literary Memorial', p. 336.

Its goal was both political and social, its technique self-aware and subtle. Filled with allusive games created to engage and edify his educated friends and correspondents, Peter's letters are rich grounds for primary-source analysis for those interested in his style.<sup>21</sup> As what Mary Carruthers has described as 'a pastiche of (mixed) metaphors and tropes of memory', Peter's style provokes a multi-faceted evocation of a literary landscape to be explored by the reader, its mysteries interpreted.<sup>22</sup> Each evocation is a glimpse into a landscape of learning with water flowing across its length and breadth.

It is important to note, as Jean Leclercq reminds us, that the intense demands of medieval letter writing are a key component of their meaning. The task of letter writing in the Middle Ages was a time-consuming and energy-intensive task; one 'engraved' a letter, 'sculptured' it. To write, one scored the blank parchment — already a product of significant labour — as if by striking (*cudere*), transforming the very process of putting quill to parchment into an act of forging. The parchment, 'even after careful preparation, always offered a certain resistance to the goose quill or the pen'.<sup>23</sup> The brevity demanded by the *modus epistolarius* was necessary, for one never knew how much parchment would be available. The pieces of parchment used for personal letters (*schedulae*) were scraps, inferior in quality to the premium pages reserved for manuscript production.<sup>24</sup>

The resemblance these originals bear to the modified corpora that survive today — of which Peter's corpus is a prime example — is likely to be slim, and yet the care taken in their retention and transmission demonstrates the esteem accorded to letters as a monastic literary genre. As Walter Ysebaert cautions historians to recall, letter collections are never transparent or simple; they have been dictated, ordered, disseminated, curated, often rewritten, often rearranged, kept, altered, and continually reused after the death of the author. They are organic entities and should be treated with respect and scrutiny.<sup>25</sup> The 'literary memorial' comes to us with Peter's will, the priorities and wishes of his successors, and the invisible hand of his centuries of curators imprinted within the words. As Patrick Geary has argued,

<sup>21</sup> Although Haseldine has argued that Peter 'has not been admired recently as a stylist' due to his 'highly wrought, often enigmatic prose [lacking] the fluency of a John of Salisbury or the urgency of a St Bernard'. Haseldine's introduction to Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, p. xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 177.

<sup>24</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 177.

<sup>25</sup> Ysebaert, 'Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources', pp. 10–62.

the past is not something that exists independently within medieval literature; it is *created*. Written records could survive or disappear and control over this process was key to medieval (and post-medieval) exercises of power and authority.<sup>26</sup> Peter was a powerful man, both during and after his death, and the power of his letter corpus reflects this.

The very effort invested in letter writing is a clear demonstration of his devotion to the art and its incumbent labours. Although some of his missives are lengthy, addressing a group or a community, others are brief and yet potent. Peter, in alliance with his friend John of Salisbury, demonstrates an aversion to the pedantic excesses of 'logic-chopping' in vogue at the time in the Paris schools, preferring instead to write vividly and without pedantry or excessive didacticism.<sup>27</sup> When the rigours of letter writing are considered, one begins to apprehend the need for densely illustrative language. Giles Constable has described medieval letters as 'quasi-public literary documents' that were 'often written with an eye to future collection and publication'. They were to be correct and elegant, rather than original and spontaneous, and yet the mode of their elegance was a form of literary performance.<sup>28</sup> Written to share in impeccable form and maximum clarity, letters required compelling rhetoric to draw interest.

Whether in the composition of the original or through curation and collation, the task of letter writing was neither convenient nor casually undertaken; the extraordinary attention to detail and prolific correspondence of Peter of Celle was no hobby, but a labour of love and effort. Brian Patrick McGuire asserts that regardless of the 'authenticity' of twelfth-century letters — were they sent, and are they a genuine expression of correspondence? — they provide 'a view of how human relationships function within the context of Christian society'.<sup>29</sup> Literary friendship and letter writing were dual products of the cathedral schools of the eleventh century, and epistolary emotional expressions should be understood as genuine expressions of a personal statement combined with wider didactic statements on moral conduct.

Wim Verbaal has pointed to the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries as the birthplace of letter corpora that were 'an autonomous entity that no longer linked, ontologically, with the world of the writer'. Verbaal sees the freeing of the text from

<sup>26</sup> Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Pepin, 'Amicitia jocosa', p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, p. 87.



the strict dictates of the creator's factual existence as the start of autopoiesis, the evolution of 'a writer [...] exercising absolute control over the textual world he or she creates'.<sup>30</sup> The disjoint of voices — the authorial and the literary — allows a *dictamen* to compose a rhetorical and poetic world larger than their content alone; they are an emotional and spiritual realm beyond quotidian communication. Verbaal points to evidence that letter-writers such as Anselm, Bernard, and Arnulf of Lisieux spent a great deal of time curating, restyling, and rearranging their letter collections, and it is not unreasonable to assume that Peter would have done the same, increasing the power of the corpus as a rhetorical whole.<sup>31</sup> If this is the case, it is all the more apparent that no rhetorical device appears by fancy alone.

The aqueous simile formed part of Peter's wider strategy for controlled rhetorical communication; the flowing of a river could be seen to resemble a flow of ideas, the ties that bind ideas great and small. Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium* explains in more detail, giving examples of the simile as a device of great flexibility that could be employed within rhetoric for excitation of emotion in the hearer, whether for praise or censure.<sup>32</sup> The same is true of the metaphor, another device of figurative speech much in evidence within medieval rhetoric. If an argument can be *like* a river or knowledge *like* rain, then it becomes possible for a *rhetor* to use the language of nature to explain matters of human discourse. Furthermore, the structural logic of water could stand in for the many parts intermingling and functioning to form a figure for contemplation or for discussion.

### *The Tongue of the Pen*

For Peter of Celle, the act of shaping letters with the pen is rendered an act of metaphorical 'speech', a flow of words as a flow of ink. The act of writing upon the page and the pouring forth of words from the mouth were merged through metaphor, an enterprise made particularly significant through monastic valorization of contemplative silence. This observation is supported by a passage in *On Affliction and Reading* in which Peter makes a distinction between necessary monastic speech and 'a crowd of people [which] even forcefully urges the facile and chattering disputants to solve [spiritual] questions which have been raised', corrupted by the

<sup>30</sup> Verbaal, 'Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History', p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Verbaal, 'Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History', p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, p. 387. Note that the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is now known to be pseudo-Ciceronian.

practices of the cathedral schools. 'By contrast', Peter continues, 'our solitary inquiry goes better in silence and is more perfectly studied in solitude. It is of the heart, not the mouth'.<sup>33</sup>

The eschewal of speech for the practice of writing was an appropriately silent and solitary task. And yet, despite this, it was not immune from the social vagaries of disputation and public debate. A telling example occurs in a long-delayed letter by Peter to Richard of Salisbury, a frequent correspondent. In an effort to compensate for the tardiness of past correspondence, the *exordium* (hortatory greeting) of the letter renders this silence a natural event, an inevitable drought of words. It is clear that it is in Peter's best interest to place culpability in deterministic natural forces, and a watery motif appears to address this need:

Etsi 'non est sermo in lingua mea,' de inopia scientiae, tamen in minibus habeo signa de plenitudine amicitie. Fontes qui precedentibus annis rupti sunt et aperti usque ad 'diluuium aquarum multarum' presenti anno siccati sunt et aruerunt usque ad defectum herbarum et uirgultorum. Hec siccitas linguam quidem et fauces tangere potuit sed non uenam dilectionis attingit, nec oleum de capite deficit. Manebit certe cum uita, immo sine dubio et ultra, name 'caritas nunquam excidit'.

(Although 'there is no speech in my tongue' from lack of knowledge, yet I have in my hands sign of the fullness of friendship. The springs, which in previous years have burst and opened causing 'a flood of many waters' have this year failed and run dry, causing a dearth of vegetation and trees. This dryness was able to touch the tongue indeed and the throat but did not touch the vein of love, nor did the oil depart from my head. It will surely flow with life, nay without doubt beyond, for 'charity never falleth away'.)<sup>34</sup>

Peter emphasizes the new flow of communication and the drought of silence with his recipient while alluding to the aridity of past correspondence — a rhetorical flourish that one suspects stems from apparent guilt over the inconstancy of communication on the part of the author. Peter was not averse to 'prodding' his correspondents if they were late in replying to his letters, nor was he afraid of making it clear when the frequency of correspondence was not to his satisfaction; he sent a series of barbed missives to the Cistercian John of Saint Malo, one of his tardiest correspondents, speculating about possible causes for his failure to send 'amicales

<sup>33</sup> Peter of Celle, *De afflictione et lectione*, CCXXXVIII.13–25, as cited in Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 165, to Richard of Salisbury, p. 643.

litteras' (friendly letters).<sup>35</sup> Sometimes, we apprehend the rhetorical narrative voice and the personal or authorial voice mingling, forming something new.

The textual flow of words blends seamlessly with the flow of water, presenting a composite image of great persuasiveness. The prose is earnest and yet florid, an interesting contrast to more mawkish expressions of rhetorical friendship identified by McGuire, who refers to the letter of a young student in France writing to a friend in Hildesheim. The student, an inexperienced *rhetor* with delusions of eloquence, exclaims that he is lost in 'the destructive darkness of Egypt', and moves on to rhapsodize about how he only wishes to be refreshed by the friend's 'most pleasing and sweet taste'. McGuire reveals that this emotional intensity was a growing twelfth-century norm, and that the clumsiness of the letter hints at an 'immature personality'.<sup>36</sup> The correspondence between Peter and Richard, rendered as a flow, is a mature and rigorous expression of literary friendship. It fluctuates between a flood and a state of drought, keenly observed with the insight of an adult intellect fully cognisant of the long-term vagaries of correspondence over distance. It is prolix, but never becomes intoxicated by its own rhetorical ingenuity. Only through regular correspondence and ardent irrigation can the interpersonal connections of love continue to flow. Through the later sharing of epistolary communication to the wider monastic community through the curation of the letters, this love could continue to spread and divide until many could listen to the words shaped by the tongue of the pen.

As an analogy of form and of function, the letter and its network of movement can be seen from a distance as a pulsing mass of interconnections linking site to site, mind to mind. Flows of ink, flows of words, and flows of interaction span the area of correspondence covered by letters. The experience of Julian Haseldine in compiling Peter's letters into a unified corpus has shown that the capture of such a complex network is problematic and often provides only a small survey of a wider and more complex reality.<sup>37</sup> The corpus reveals in practice what Ysebaert raises as a methodological conundrum — letters are never what they initially appear. Many of the letters written to friends and acquaintances by Peter of Celle possess a strongly oral quality: the feeling that the letter is captured speech written for a group of listeners. This is unsurprising, given the essentially oral nature of the *dictamen*, a

<sup>35</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, p. 272.

<sup>36</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, pp. 189–90.

<sup>37</sup> Haseldine, 'The Creation of a Literary Memorial', pp. 333–34.

word stemming from the verb *dicere*, ‘to speak’.<sup>38</sup> A letter, by this token, is speech captured in written form for transportation, but never fully divorced from the need to become words. Focused upon reading and hearing rather than on rhetorical speech in the classical sense, these words supplemented monastic communication in contexts conducive to a contemplative life. Orality remained implicit in the *ars dictaminis*, since letters were often dictated to a scribe and read aloud by the recipient. For the monastic, regulated by licit and illicit contexts for speech, the proxy speech of a letter had a unique set of resonances. The letter spoke when the monk was silent, and the reproduction of letter-speech took place in the mandated setting of contemplation and spiritual devotion.

Speech had long been associated with the fluidity of eloquence, mingling the flow of words from the mouth with the enriching flow of a river. This was a natural correlation drawn between human faculties and their similes within the natural world. The outpouring qualities of water from an unseen source are a comfortable fit with the effluent nature of speech bursting forth from the mouth. This bond had a long pedigree, for in Plato’s *Timaeus* — a text much read, glossed, and commented upon in the twelfth century — this bond was stated as a fundamental property of human speech and intellection:

Our makers fitted the mouth out with teeth, a tongue, and lips in their current arrangement, to accommodate both what is necessary and what is best: they designed the mouth as the entry passage for what is necessary and as the exit for what is best: for all that comes in and provides nourishment for the body is necessary, while that stream of speech that flows out through the mouth, that instrument of intelligence, is the fairest and best of all streams.<sup>39</sup>

The art of rhetoric — the adornment of this ‘best of all streams’ through eloquence — appears as a naturally flowing image of riparian bounty wedded to a human outpouring of words. This notion required modification in the monastic context, rendering the natural nourishment of speech through a textual metaphor of spiritual wisdom. The simile is powerful, for both bring nutrition (one natural, the other intellectual). If human beings — be they contemporary or medieval — come to think in fluid terms, then the thematic qualities of their narration of ideas undergo a shift towards liquidity. Thus, by engaging with the poetics of fluidity within rhetoric, this chapter reorients medieval speech with that to which it bears a mimetic resemblance within nature. Through the analogy of nature, flowing speech is

<sup>38</sup> Kong, *Lettering the Self in Medieval and Early Modern France*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 75c, p. 70.

transmuted into the flow of the pen and of the mind in written rhetoric. One might also speculate that the later editing of the letters could have enhanced this fluid rhetorical quality as a mode of didacticism: it imparts moral wisdom with remarkable ease.

Through an explicit link between human eloquence and the flowing forth of a water source, Peter's rhetoric demonstrates water's material imagery imbued into human expression. The valorization of speech, however, is not as simple as it first appears. The motif of verbal expression becomes especially important in a monastic context, for it was the practice of reading and writing and not that of speech that formed the licit medium of communication. The speech of the letter is all the more valuable, for it captures the expression of words without the need to utter them. When uttered in the reading or sharing of a letter, these words were not superfluous, but instead served as food for contemplation in future silence. The absence of speech in favour of reading, confession and prayer, claimed Peter in *The School of the Cloister*, 'nourishes the good seed under the shade of its seal and causes it to reach maturity'.<sup>40</sup> Peter is explicit in communicating this point:

If a tongue which tries to negotiate a slippery spot moves without the support of the fear of God, it finds it difficult to avoid slipping and it will most likely fall. Let it not open the doors of the lips, except perhaps on the Sabbath day and the first day of the month in order to recall future rest and the joys of the saints. In such silence holy desires, peace of heart, and tranquillity with true purity increase and multiply.<sup>41</sup>

In the figurative world of letters, redundant speech is substituted for the salvific effects of inner discourse issuing from a spiritual mouth. Letters and letter writing, as Jean Leclercq has described, 'harmonised with the silence enjoined by the *Rule*, with the vow of stability, and with cloistered life'.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he argued, '[m]onastic milieux, their intense life, and their psychology could not be really understood if their epistolary literature were not taken into account'.<sup>43</sup> 'They enable us [...] to picture almost every aspect of monastic life; indeed, some aspects are known to us only through letters'.<sup>44</sup> In a world of contemplative silence, the textual representation of speech and the permitted reading and recitation of these words offer an insight into a shared inner monologue. The landscape of letters offers

<sup>40</sup> Peter of Celle, 'The School of the Cloister', trans. by Feiss, XVIII.1, p. 101.

<sup>41</sup> Peter of Celle, 'The School of the Cloister', trans. by Feiss, XVIII.1, p. 101.

<sup>42</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 179.

representations of speech acts in a world where orality was a complex phenomenon.<sup>45</sup>

The facility of the tongue and the agility of the pen are fluid modes of communication, and the metaphorical connotations of water evoke both. The outpouring of knowledge from mind to mind formed apprehensible streams of thought to follow with the mind, an intuitive path through the disorder and universal chaos of the world. When recalling the previous missive of Richard of Salisbury, Peter immediately sketches a hydrology of words in which wisdom bursts forth through the proxy of the pen, drenching the pages of correspondence with wisdom: ‘De uase siquidem bono et optimo eructauit stilus tuus uerba bona, uerba consolatoria que me a “diluuiio aquarum multarum” ad archam Noe, qui interpretatur requies prouocant et de claustrali disciplina non solum cogitare sed et scribere exorant’ (Your pen poured forth good words from a good and excellent vessel, consoling words which call me forth from the ‘flood of many waters’ to the ark of Noah, which is interpreted as rest, and beg me not only to think about cloistered discipline but also write about it.)<sup>46</sup> Decanting knowledge from the vessel of the mind, the letter becomes a flow of good ideas with remediating effect. Through their purity and clarity, they dispel the confusion of the world, shaping a peaceful world of spiritual friendship. It draws from a deep well of aqueous symbolism — a resonance echoed in translation by Seamus Heaney in ‘Colmcille the Scribe’, a 1997 adaptation of an early Irish poem. In Heaney’s words, the scribe recounts his tribulations and triumphs, his flow of ink: ‘Wisdom keeps welling in streams | From my fine-drawn sallow hand: | Riverrun on the vellum | of ink from green-skinned holly’.<sup>47</sup> There was power to the association of quill and ink, hand and page. Just as a dam or a waterwheel could take water and shape it into a source of power for medieval industry, so too could the flow of ink take the unformed fluid potential of intellect and turn it to more finely controlled ends. Peter’s preoccupations, compared to those of Godfrey in the preceding chapter, are often more on the miraculous provision of waters, but traces of industry appear when discussing the amenities of bathing and the agriculture of erudition.

<sup>45</sup> This theme is the productive focus of a collection of essays in the Brepols *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* series. See Vanderputten ed., *Understanding Monastic Practices of Oral Communication*.

<sup>46</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 166, to Richard of Salisbury, pp. 642–45.

<sup>47</sup> The poem was translated in celebration of the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Columba (Colmcille). The Royal Irish Academy was gifted with 150 signed vellum copies of the poem created by the calligrapher Tim O’Neill.

The moral focus and restorative power of words contrast with the confusion and doubt of temporal affairs. The sea of the world motif, coupled with the stalwart navigating the chaos, sets up a moral drama of compelling complexity. There are, in fact, two forms of fluid motif at work in this passage: the fountain of words, with ink equated to a saving spring, and the turbulent ocean as setting. The passage has two functions. First, it reveals a common understanding of a quasi-biblical moral landscape, or at least an assumption on the part of Peter of such a common understanding. Secondly, we perceive a rhetorical argument, a mobilization of flattery to put the reader in an amenable frame of mind. The reminder 'not only to think about cloistered discipline but also to write about it' is key, for what is common monastic life without community? The flow of words between correspondents is a reminder that ideas must flow between human being and human being laterally so that many may learn how better to approach the lofty object of their religious devotion.

In making use of these two layers of greeting, Peter has put forth an image of temporal turmoil, with Peter cast adrift in the distracting affairs of worldly life. The recipient is cast as a second Noah — himself a type of Christ — redeeming Peter with his saving correspondence and inspiring him to write, not only for the sake of the reader, but for his own salvation from idleness. In this context, rhetoric demonstrates both the violent turbulence of worldly life and the sweet and thirst-quenching nature of spiritual wisdom gleaned through correspondence. In certain cases, the boundaries between body and landscape — meaningless as they are within a world of abstraction — twist and blur. In the case below, we observe the constant interplay between flesh and soil, bodily moisture and landscape moisture:

*Cum per fenestras suas aliquando prospiciunt, perfusus nescio quibus stillicidiis humectatus apparet. Audires pectora eorum tanquam gigantes gemere sub aquis. Neque enim aridi sunt licet lignum aridum sit corpus eorum; et miror cum uirtus in corpore pene defecerit unde tantus gemitus in pectore, cum fluuius humorum naturalium rigore abstinentie exhaustus sit unde tantus impetus lacrimarium.*

(When [monastics] look out their windows at any time, a mist, distilled by I know not what rains, appears. You would hear their hearts groaning like giants under the waters.<sup>48</sup> Neither are they dried up, although their body be a dry tree, and I wonder whence comes such a lamentation of the heart, since strength has almost given out

<sup>48</sup> 'Behold the giants groan under the waters, and they that dwell with them. Hell is naked before him, and there is no covering for destruction'. Job 56. 3–5.



in the body; whence comes such a flow of tears, since the river of natural moisture has dried up through the river of abstinence.)<sup>49</sup>

The moisture of the soul contrasts strikingly with the aridity of the austere and celibate body. The moisture of the heart and tears of abundant spiritual contrition are set in contradistinction to the 'dry tree' of the body, an austere desert devoid of concupiscence.<sup>50</sup> In this desert, water is all the more precious, a miraculous fecundity of spiritual life brought forth by the observation of the monastic rule. The tree of the body may be dry, but the celibate has a special place in heaven, an anguished longing from beneath the flood of temporal life. Like the miracle *ex nihilo* of the rock of Horeb pouring forth water into the desert, so too is the spirit a font of salvific force with powerful biblical resonance. All is connected in the cycle of spirituality, and Peter captures both the evaporation of sin and the welling up of virtue through dense biblical allusion and a powerful rhetorical flourish. It is through the nourishing flow of words, and through the bounty of the pen, that the rivers of community flowed across great geographical and mental distance, bringing the burgeoning twelfth-century epistolary network closer together.

Peter and his corpus of letters demonstrate the power of eloquence in written form for medieval monastic communities. The far-flung spiritual nodes of a growing twelfth-century network were united by a flow of monks, goods, letters, manuscripts, and ideas. Peter's power lay in his moral authority, and this authority was established, shaped, and maintained through the speech of his quill. Just as the poetic river of Godfrey's *Fons philosophiae* sparked with the gold of wisdom and the silver of eloquence, so too were Peter's words shot through with esoteric qualities rendered as material qualities by water. The nutritive powers of these waters were sought by his readership for their vivifying effects, long after the man himself had died.

### *The Agriculture of Community*

Drawing on a rich collection of tropes and allegories, Peter sketches out varied and elaborate but small and self-contained *exempla* for the edification of his readers.

<sup>49</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 28, to Hardouin of Larrivour, pp. 98–99.

<sup>50</sup> The 'dry tree' refers to the Lord commanding 'let not the eunuch say: Behold I am a dry tree', for 'I will give to them in my house, and within my walls, a place, and a name better than sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name which shall never perish'. Isaiah 53. 3–5.

They are the space for reader and writer to come together and share in the bounty of erudite learning. It is within the complex of tropes that I describe as an agriculture of community that we see Peter the self-editing *rhetor* most clearly. The effort and dedication that clearly radiate from these paragraphs reveal the amount of emotional investment imbued in his words, and the importance of communicating the message. It is unsurprising that a monastic magnate such as Peter would home in on this core theme. It is compelling to observe the hydrological scapes and flows of his rhetoric enabling this complex and shared moral world. His expression of knowledge, through Scripture and through advice, is a powerful investment in a common monastic Good. In *The School of the Cloister*, Peter renders the act of reading as an expression of agriculture:

[...] reading is a very rich pasturage, in which small and large animals prepare fat holocausts for the Lord by continual browsing, when they ruminate within themselves the sweetest flowers of divine scripture and have nothing else in their hearts or in their mouths. Thus, constant and attentive reading done devoutly purifies our innards of the bones of dead men and the corpses of thought which should be cut out.<sup>51</sup>

In many ways, it is apt to render Peter of Celle as a farmer of souls; more precisely, it may be even more apt to see him as both a farmer and an agriculturalist more broadly. His task is to fertilize the soil for his readers and take care of his herd or flock, to watch over their flourishing, direct the growth of new spiritual vegetation, and eradicate the weeds of folly and vice. Peter makes use of this image in *On Conscience*, admonishing that '[w]e must water, trench, prune and fortify the tender religious life in our novices, until it is rooted underneath and bears fruit above'.<sup>52</sup> This brings the notion of pastoral care to a new level, for one can almost see Peter roaming the abstraction he has so carefully shaped, tending it, protecting the uninitiated from ruin, and chiding transgressions. The clarity of his didacticism in such a complex medium demonstrates a potent rhetorical talent. It shapes words and controls them as a farmer would shape and tend the land, focusing their potential into something didactic and forceful.

In such a world, hydrological awareness is essential; no agricultural endeavour in the material world can hope to succeed without appropriate irrigation, and the world of abstraction is no exception. There is an economy of what we might call *vis naturae*, the force of nature, flowing through the landscape of Peter's letters.

<sup>51</sup> Peter of Celle, 'The School of the Cloister', trans. by Feiss, XIX, 2, p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> Peter of Celle, 'On Conscience', trans. by Feiss, LXVII, p. 173.

Like water, it transfers from constituent part to constituent part of a vast network, bringing new life and energy in its wake. Correspondence, to Peter, is a field of earth that, like its literal counterpart, must be irrigated with speech, sowed with the seeds of wisdom, and harvested for the cause of mutual edification and friendship. The literary *amicitia* shaped by his style translates the reward and erudition gained from spiritual correspondence into new life engendered by the nourishing transfer of moisture into a dry landscape. It is nothing new — nutrition and aridity, desert and paradise are well-worn tropes — and yet their combination creates something greater than the sum of their parts.

In his paternal role as spiritual pastor and ‘farmer’ of the soul, Peter solicitously and studiously nourishes worlds of fecund spiritual life in the pages of his epistolary corpus. His hydrology emerges through a collection of structural evocations that add up to an effect greater than the sum of their parts. His hydrologies are not only evocations of the interconnectivity of ideas with other ideas, but also of the vast, dynamic, and ever-shifting web of interconnections between monastic communities, between figures of spiritual authority and their diverse admirers. In a missive to Archbishop Eshil of Lund, Peter describes his words as a rain that falls upon the landscape of discourse, permeating the very ground and bringing forth the cultivated bounty of correspondence, a verdant flowering of shared wisdom:

Nam qui seminat primum in spe percipiendi fructus seminat, deinde non fundit sed spargit, postremo non nisi culte terre semen suum credit. Horum nichil imitatur pluuiam, sed se ipsam, ut sic dicam, perdit in terre uisceribus ut postea resurgens cum maxima frugum prole afferat fructum tricesimum, sexagesimum et centesimum.

(For the sower first sows in the hope of gathering harvest, then he does not pour out the seed but scatters it, finally he entrusts his seed only to cultivated land. Rain is not at all like this, but loses itself, so to speak, in the bowels of the earth so that afterwards, rising again with the greatest burden of fruit, it brings forth produce thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold.)<sup>53</sup>

The agricultural metaphor was a common trope of spiritual language, utilized repeatedly in metaphysical imagery. The image of flowing water transferring celestial qualities from on high into the hidden womb of the earth was a powerful material visualization. Peter is ever mindful that although the flow of learning is transitory, the effects it generates endure, inspiring further blooming of spiritual

<sup>53</sup> Peter of Celle. *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 12, to Archbishop Eshil of Lund, pp. 28–29.

endeavour in turn. Spiritual learning cannot prosper without an awareness of the interconnections between principles, the structural logic of inner life.

In another letter addressing the general chapter of the Carthusians, an order which Peter greatly admired and encouraged in his correspondence, the spiritual bounty of the priors becomes the outpouring of the sealed fountain: 'Refusione uberiore irrigatur "hortus" Dei ille "conclusus, fons signatus", quotiens in unum conueniunt fistule et canales benigni spiritus Dei, non ad calices Babylonicos absorbendos sed ad feces Iacob expurgandas et uentres steriles fecundandos' (That 'garden' of God 'enclosed', that 'fountain sealed up' is watered by a more abundant outpouring as often as the water pipes and channels of the kindly Spirit of God converge in one place, not to fill the cups of Babylon but to purge the dregs of Jacob and to make the barren wombs fruitful.)<sup>54</sup> The one-to-many form of this letter is telling, addressed as it is from one learned master to many disciples. It flows, like a manifold river, from a unitary source for the enrichment of many. The 'irrigative' effect of Carthusian priors is a little exemplum reflecting on the vivifying effect of pious conference. One can imagine that a community of Carthusians, prolific users of the latest medieval gravity-flow water systems, would have enjoyed Peter's choice of *figura*. By likening human activity to material interaction through the power of rhetoric, Peter likens the cyclical nature of interpersonal correspondence to the hydrological cycle. Furthermore, the evocation of particular *loci* within Scripture merges physical motion through space with moral action on an individual level and with salvation history as a whole.

In *On Affliction and Reading*, Peter forms the link between the events of Genesis and the profits of reading:

[Reading Genesis] with the appropriate gratitude you will find out about the first channels of God's goodness, which because of his bountiful fullness, flowed out into the creation of the world and overflowed in the array of the works of the [first] six days.<sup>55</sup>

Peter puts forth a fluid representation of the complexities and fecundity of the sacred page as a means of broader edification and by means of his mastery of exegesis, *figura*, and parable. His evocation of Genesis is, in many ways, a typological history of the water within his rhetoric. The original waters divided from one source to fill the world with bounty. Christ, by life and by deed, continued the saga

<sup>54</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 35, to Prior Basil of La Grande Chartreuse and the general chapter of the Carthusian Order, pp. 132, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Peter of Celle, 'On Affliction and Reading', trans. by Feiss, xv, p. 137.

by bringing new vitality to a human race parched by the aridity of the Fall. Peter, like a spiritual type of Christ, seeks to distribute the bounty of his words. This is done not in arrogance (although not without a certain flair) but in imitation. By linking Scripture to water, he ensures the enduring strength of the allegorical link and the irrigation of his correspondents. In the role of biblical exegete, he uses a similar rhetorical device to that deployed by Guy of Bazoches, his contemporary:

The fountain of saving doctrine gushes out abundantly, and it brings forth three crystal-clear streams, as it were, in order to irrigate the fields of our minds. It divides the spiritual understanding of the sacred page into three parts, rendering it historically, allegorically and morally.<sup>56</sup>

Both of the above passages, explicitly created for a didactic purpose, shed light on the subtler use of imagery found within the medium of the letter. The smaller landscape of the letter, traversed within the mind's eye, teaches through its form every bit as much as scriptural hermeneutics. Peter demonstrates a key principle of medieval figurative expression, the scalability of meaning from the large to the small. Water infuses and illuminates at every level, from the microcosm of the *figurae* found within letters to the great flow of time narrated within Scripture.

The fall of rain, as well as the flow of the river, permeates the landscape of the letter. The transfer of knowledge, the blessing of humanity by divine favour, and the gifts of Christ's death and rebirth are all likened to the immediate and sensually satisfying image of water falling from the sky. In falling, this transfer of power to earth from the heights participates in a vast web of interconnections, maps of ideas in the image of a hydrological cycle. Rain, to quote Scripture, falls on all regardless of their moral worthiness; it is a gift of God's inclusive love:

Aliud [...] caritatis indicium in pluuiā reperiō quia sine delectu rigat fecunda et infecunda, fertilem agrum et sterilem, granum electum et germen reprobū. Estne uirtutis an uitii, hec bonitatis et beneficiorum prodigalitas? Sed hoc Dei, nec aliud in eo inuenitur uitium nisi quod benignus ad ingrātum, largus ad auarum, pius ad impiū existit.

(I perceive in rain another token of love, that it waters without distinction the fruitful and the unfruitful, the fertile field and the sterile, the chosen seed and the rejected shoot. Is it a mark of virtue or of vice, this prodigality of blessings and favours? But this is of God and no other vice is found in Him but that He is kind to the ungrateful, generous to the greedy, and merciful to the wicked.)<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> As cited in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, p. 71.

<sup>57</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 12, to Archbishop Eshil of Lund, p. 29.

Peter continues with his allegory, explaining rhetorically that the verbal *viriditas* of his pen, unlike the narrow attention of one sowing seed, is a universally nourishing influence. Words, like the gift of rain, are to Peter a manifest sign of divine providence, a gift from God. Like Christ, who died and rose once more with the fruit of salvation, the waters that fall to earth as rain must rise again through the fruit that they irrigate. No matter how recalcitrant or morally bankrupt the readers, eloquent, saving words have the power to spread the Good across the face of the earth. Like the four rivers of paradise watering the corners of the earth and the four gospels that must be heard across the world, sacred words are a universal rain of fluid eloquence. Through this eloquence, it seems, even the most churlish reader will be educated in moral rectitude. Although many of Peter's letters are kindly in nature, the above passage demonstrates that his rhetoric is effective not only for gentler advice, but for stern admonishment couched in a genial framework.

Peter's power — as a church magnate, as a moral exemplar, as a senior monastic — was exercised through his epistolary network. Those he chose to address, and those who addressed him, were a manifestation of his prominent position within his society. The magnetism of his political and social power was reflected in his engineering of the *ars dictaminis* to direct and deliver flows of wisdom. He controlled his words as he influenced his correspondents. His words continued to memorialize his power after his death, rewritten and republished for the edification of later generations of monastics. Like a saintly *vita*, his letters were a showcase of his achievement, a map of his influences captured for all time. By understanding Scripture, politics, and rhetoric, Peter revealed his political acumen. Power in twelfth-century monasticism came from words and deeds. Although Bernard of Clairvaux entered the Cistercian Order as a wealthy member of the Burgundian nobility, his power came from his words: he was the *doctor mellifluus*. Peter was likewise a member of a privileged elite, but it was his words, and not money, that demonstrated his true power.

Peter collaborated with other powerful contemporaries to create shared demonstrations of moral authority and spiritual *amicitia*. In a letter to his friend John of Salisbury, Peter expands upon his agricultural theme, extending it to a metaphysical grandeur. Peter, through the image of a seed nourished by the germane effects of words, likens his friendship with John of Salisbury to the growth of a great bounty from a concentrated beginning:

Nouit prudentia tua quod 'granum frumenti cadens in terram nisi mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet, si autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert'. Granuli nostri fructum centesimum spero me recepturum, partim roris superni fecunda infusione, partim agri quem benedixit Dominus leta fecunditate.

(You in your wisdom know that ‘unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit’. I hope that I will receive back the hundredfold fruit of our little seed, partly through a fruitful watering of celestial dew, partly through the joyous fecundity of the field which the Lord has blessed.)<sup>58</sup>

Peter is comfortable in his role as the spiritual agriculturalist in the passage above, sketching out the allegory of a potent seed, collectively shaped through mutual amity and planted within the sanctified field of the monastic soul. Just as the farmer is attentive to his crops, so too is Peter emotionally attentive to the care of friendship. The parable of the sower shapes much of Peter’s discourse, revealing his self-perceived quest to find good ground for spiritual things to grow. As all farmers know, and as the parable of Mark 4. 10–20 renders in spiritual terms, the effort placed in the cultivation of plant life is returned in abundance upon the fruition of the mature plant. So too is the case in the figurative world of Peter’s labours, as he clearly explains: ‘Prouenit namque numerosa proles benedictionum ex accessu dati optimi siue doni perfecti cum libero arbitrio boni hominis. Ubi enim gratia saliendo cum impetu eterne emanationis influit, quid anima nisi uita refluit?’ (For a numerous progeny of blessings arises from the accession of the best gift, the perfect gift, with the free will of a good man. For where grace flows in by springing with the force of the eternal emanations, what does the soul do except overflow with life?)<sup>59</sup> In this case, the seed planted in the spirit of spiritual correspondence is blessed by divine will, bursting forth as an abundance of eloquent spiritual meaning. Through the mobilization of an elaborate rhetorical array of tropes, it appears that Peter hopes to impress upon John the profitability of letter writing, and simply to impress him. Ending with a reminder of the lofty providence of grace, this passage is equally a moral admonition, a rhetorical flourish from one skilled practitioner to another, and an expression of pious hope for bounty to come.

The image of a garden within the mind and soul watered by the rain of good deeds and wisdom is understandably well suited to the conventions of letter writing, a genre of medieval textual practice replete with personal and collective spiritual advice. As with Hugh of Foilloy’s *De clauastro anime*, a treatise in which the soul and all of its manifold properties are rendered as a cloister, monastic letter writing often contains a characteristic liking for architectural, natural, and agricul-

<sup>58</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 169, to John of Salisbury, p. 653.

<sup>59</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 169, to John of Salisbury, pp. 652–53.



tural imagery. Peter builds upon this trope through repetition, using various *colores* to suit the point at hand.

Through the peculiar and unique material qualities of fluidity, Peter imbues his figurative language with the flexibility of its aqueous subject matter. Images of eloquence in contrast to the sterility of ignorance demonstrate the peculiar qualities given to rhetoric in letter writing by the use of fluid language. Rhetoric, through the language of the hydrological cycle and human engagement with its bounty, taps into the language of nourishment and of life. Words thus become regenerating entities, providing fertile ground for the growth of virtue, wisdom, and erudition. Through this process, rhetoric presents Peter with the opportunity to link human interior spirituality with something visible within the natural world in a dynamic, nutritive role.

Peter often turns to the task of warning his readers away from the perils of worldly things, an important pastoral duty for a man in ecclesiastical authority. In the example below, from a letter with an implied group audience, the listener is warned of the impermanence of worldly things. The world dissolves away, and only appropriate monastic *contemptus mundi* can allow an appreciation of higher, more appropriate things:

Varius rerum cursus, seculorum uolubulitate irremediabiliter innexus, nichil eternum sibi inesse euidenti ratione approbat. Currit, fluit, fugit, labitur et euanescit quicquid unquam habere potest mundanus usus. Precurrit defectus satietatem, preterfluit adeptio appetitum, effugit instantiam desiderii fumus glorie, elabitur utenti imago felicitates, euanescit a uiuentibus uita, quia 'dum ordider succidit me'.

(The varying course of affairs, irretrievably entangled with the instability of worldly things, proves by manifest reason that there is in it nothing stable, nothing everlasting. Anything which worldly use can ever lay hold on runs, flows, flees, slips away, and vanishes. Lack outruns satisfaction, attainment flows beyond the reach of longing, the smoke of glory escapes the precinct of desire, the image of happiness steps away from its possessor, life vanishes from the living because 'while I was beginning he cut me off'.)<sup>60</sup>

The fleeting fluidity of worldly things makes a point of comparison with the permanence of Jerusalem's rivers. Both are fluid, and yet one flows from the throne of Christ eternally while the other slips into decay, irrelevance, and negation.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 59, to Prior Simon and the community of Mont-Dieu, pp. 276–77.

<sup>61</sup> 'And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Revelation 22. 1.

Elemental traits emerge within the metaphor: worldly impermanence rises hot and dry like smoke, while spiritual meaning falls cold and wet. In both cases, it is the traits of fluidity that sustain the vision of the letter writer, and yet each case focuses on a very different moral message. Fluidity can be seen clearly narrating but not always representing spiritual meaning. That is, the moral message is sustained by the invocation of water's rich biblical and spiritual imagery, and yet the object of interest is something else entirely. The sea of the world, a motif popular with monastic writers, emerges once more within a complex interplay of ocean and human artifice, the stability of spirituality and the wrecking force of sin:

As long as reason slumbered the barque of conscience in the world was shaken by the troughs of the sea, so that the prow of leading counsel was buffeted by the blows of carnal impulses, and the stern of reasoned judgement was dashed in a collision with dangerous rocks, that is, temptations which rise up frequently. The whole perimeter of the soul was spun around in a single gyration into a deep failure.<sup>62</sup>

This passage, once again, shapes a powerful compound image with few words. All is present: the ship of conscience, the seething ocean of the world, the jagged rocks of sin, and the abyss of spiritual failure.<sup>63</sup> Together, these principles define the interconnectivity, force of motion, promise, and consequence of moral life in a single taut passage. Fluid imagery serves to link both the opportunities and challenges of worldly life to the failures and eternal possibilities of spiritual life; all *loci* exist within a complex map of spiritual possibilities illuminated by Peter in his letters, fed by and enlarged through the reader's pre-existing knowledge of Scripture and monastic spiritual beliefs. The space admonishes and encourages by comparing moral *topoi* and connecting them spatially. The abyss, the sea of the world, the river of life, the ship of the Church: all of these figures exist as a shared imagining perpetuated through shared reading, a community imagining of moral life, its perils, and its possibilities.<sup>64</sup>

The more ambiguous scriptural allusions and figurative parables are accompanied by more explicit scriptural exegesis and invocation of paradise, both Eden and

<sup>62</sup> Peter of Celle, 'On Conscience', trans. by Feiss, LVIII, pp. 167–68.

<sup>63</sup> I have researched and discussed the 'sea of the world' *topos* at length in 'Fluid', an essay in Cohen ed., *Inhuman Nature*.

<sup>64</sup> In an interesting parallel, Hugh of Saint-Victor attributes the creation of his *De archa Noe* to anxieties within his community of Victorine canons as to the cause of the 'instability and restlessness' of the human heart. His response was to create the Moral Ark, a mnemotechnical construct for the imagination and navigation of temporal instability. Zinn, 'Minding Matter', pp. 47–48.

Jerusalem. Moral absolutes help to provide ideals to aspire to in monastic life. This reveals another facet of Peter's letter-writing style, the letter-as-sermon. Previous examples, although stylized and highly rhetorical, are aimed at a single correspondent: a friend, superior, or colleague. The water allegory employed relates more closely to the dynamics of speech, be it the fecundity of spiritual correspondence, the flow of words, or the outpouring of the pen. In the passage to follow, Peter addresses a group of his brothers with a salutary message, inviting imagination:

[...] intra et uide situm et dispositionem ciuitatis cuius platee sternuntur auro mundo, ubi uitreis canalibus, immo cristallinis, id est inspiratione inuisibili, aque uiue do trono ad singulas sanctarum conscientiarum tanquam cellas in plenitudine gratiarum profluunt siue ad bibendum propter gandum propter fecunditatem.

([...] enter and see the site and arrangement of the city whose broad streets are paved with fine gold, where living waters flow forth in fullness of blessings through glass, or rather crystalline, channels, that is by invisible inspiration, from the throne to each of the cells, as it were, of holy consciences, whether for drinking for the sake of pleasure, or for washing for the sake of cleanliness, or for irrigation for the sake of fertility.)<sup>65</sup>

This passage compares particularly well to the arts of preaching, for this is a letter that was undoubtedly written, as much correspondence was, to be read out loud in the classical style for collective monastic edification. The aqueous component has moved from the narration of speech itself to the object, the contemplation of the crystalline Jerusalem with its saving rivers. The ultimate end of spiritual moisture, through allegory, links the rivers of monastic piety to their ultimate source and destination outside of time. The anagogical Jerusalem serves as an inspiration for moral behaviour in the temporal world, the two spaces connected by the mediating flow of water. This is an effective rhetorical employment of fluidity, an aid to imagination in a short glimpse of perfection. Images of bodily purity and of the ritual washing away of sin are likewise invoked. By describing the river of eternal life, Peter seems to employ the nutritive qualities of fluidity as a tantalizing companion to his moral exhortations. By inviting the reader to see the crystalline streams and imagine the miraculous properties of their waters, Peter includes the implied audience of the letter in his vision of monastic good conduct. The image of flowing water assists in the fecundity of this image, its dynamism, and its purity.

In the next example, Peter's letter makes use of a figurative flow of cleansing spiritual meaning as a tool of moral admonition. He equates the diversion of waters

<sup>65</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 42, to Brother A and the community of Montier-la-Celle, pp. 170–71.

for the amenity and good health of monastics with the divine provision of spiritual bounty. To take the engineering miracle (to echo Arnold) of monastic waterworks for granted would be a sin equal to ingratitude in the face of Christ's example. As is often the case, the ridiculous wastefulness of failing to take full advantage of the spiritual plenitude of monastic life is expounded upon at length:

Habete uascula munda, iuxta namque et in oculis preterfluit aqua. Sed numquid uane? Sed numquid gratis? Plane supine et crassa negligentia imputanda est singulis nisi sint omnia munda, quibus et copia aquarum redundat et temporis opportunitas superest et amor incumbit totius munditie et ordinis consuetude regragatur.

(Keep your vessels clean, for water flows past nearby and within your sight. But is it in vain? But is it without reward? Clearly the indolent and gross negligence of individuals is to be blamed if all things are not pure when for these individuals an abundance of water flows, and suitable times exist in plenty, and love of complete cleanliness is incumbent, and the custom of the order does not stand in the way.)<sup>66</sup>

Once the blindness of those who have failed to fully appreciate the flowing bounty of good moral conduct has been exposed, Peter turns to self-evaluation. In a characteristically monastic vein of self-deprecation, he implies that he has not felt the cleansing effect of appropriate moral contrition in sufficient quantities. The fluid link from God to human being can be interacted with, and the abstract corpus of the soul can be washed by the waters of eternal life. The existence of this link is a source of anguish when ignored, and teaches a lesson to those living the regular life. If one is too observant of the minutiae of monastic life without thought to their spiritual meaning, then the mind is misdirected when true ablution is required within the soul. The water of salvation waits, but must be sought with the heart and not replaced with mundane gestures: 'Sic est, ego uidi, ego interfui, et utinam totiens et tam sedulo cor expurgassem quotiens et quam indesinenter manus et faciem die et nocte rigauim, non lacrimis sed aquis' (So it is, I have seen it, I have been present, and if only I had purified my heart as often and as keenly as I have often and incessantly rinsed my hands and face day and night, not with tears but with water.)<sup>67</sup> Some of the most powerful hydrologies within Peter's letters emerge through the interactions of the waters within and the waters without. By demonstrating the interconnectivity of inner flows and motions with the wider macrocosmic undulations of the cosmos, Peter demonstrates that the body is tied to all other things. By comparing the clean-

<sup>66</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 62, to G, a priest of Hastings, pp. 285–87.

<sup>67</sup> Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and trans. by Haseldine, Letter 62, to G, a priest of Hastings, pp. 286–87.

liness within — the 'washing' of the heart — with the washing of the body, Peter demonstrates a truly hydrological point. There exists a river of diverse spiritual channels linking the human soul to God at all times; all is connected through Creation. Despite the Fall, the mind can follow this link back to its source. By sharing this link through the broader network of monastic correspondence, the wisdom needed for spiritual edification can spread, nourishing souls and recalling minds to the source.

### *Conclusion: Rhetorical Flows and Epistolary Macrotexts*

As a result of his enthusiasm for figurative writing, Peter of Celle crafted not one but many aqueous abstractions within his work, each created for a rhetorical purpose and yet more commodious than his powerful command of metaphor and simile alone can explain. Peter deployed a self-conscious mobilization of figurative language as a strategy of communication, an evocation with words of a world within the mind's eye. His letters constructed and continue to construct a rich visual landscape filled with complex amalgams of tropes designed to convince, entertain, edify, and enlighten.

Enabled by a comprehensive understanding of biblical exegesis and an encyclopaedic knowledge of Scripture, letter collections bring together a vast array of ideas and bind them in a matrix of meaning. They are a macrotext, a term defined by Mara Santi as 'a sign in its own right generated by independent texts, whose meaning does not correspond to the mere sum of the meanings of the individual texts'.<sup>68</sup> The rhetorical world opened up by Peter's letters is composed of facts, tropes, adages, emotions, and data, but it is also a rhetorical creation all of its own, an ever-self-generating composite. To refer back to John Urry, the aqueous rhetorical thought-space was populated by flows, lines of thought-stuff translated into words and moving back and forth between the nodes of a monastic intellectual thoughtscape. It is the mode by which the relay of moral and interpersonal content passed between loci. Peter, as a particularly well connected node in this system, was able to draw upon rhetorical *colores* to set the space for the complex transactions of monastic letter-writing. And yet, as creator, he was part of a greater entity.

Eloquence, a trait often associated with fluidity, was fundamental to Peter's epistolary style. Redolent of biblical learning and spiritual reflexivity, many of his letters made use of aqueous motifs in the description of spiritual yearnings, appreciation of spiritual erudition, and expression of friendship and good will towards

<sup>68</sup> Santi, 'Performative Perspectives on Short Story Collections', p. 147. Cited and discussed in the context of medieval letters in Verbaal, 'Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History', p. 13.

the recipient. Ronald Witt claims that within the rules of the twelfth-century *ars dictaminis*, '[t]he tone of letters, even when they were supposedly personal communications, was formal and consciously crafted to evoke the desired response'.<sup>69</sup> In the case of Peter of Celle, many of his surviving missives are intended for friends, close acquaintances, or at the very least regular correspondents. Leclercq, a monastic himself, paints a picture of a world of letters in which lack of physical proximity makes friendship more perfect, in which absence ignites spiritual passion, conferring spiritual friendship with the incorporeal intimacy of a relationship with God.<sup>70</sup>

Through the vivid imagery of flowing water, the recipient or recipients of a letter from Peter of Celle would have found assistance in the apprehension of the many moral points contained therein. It would appear that the conventions of ecclesiastical — and especially monastic — correspondence placed a premium on the accessibility of moral learning. For Peter, the flexible moral meaning and physical properties of fluidity served as a narrator of the moral point he wished to expound. The use of fluidity in his letters ranges from a simple use of common human experience of water in daily life to complicated anagogic images of a deeply devotional nature. Within Peter's letters, many requirements of the *ars dictaminis* are met with the aid of fluidity. Aqueous traits combine with a wide range of moral tropes and images to expedite an essential task: the mutual spiritual edification of writer and recipient.

Unlike many of the other interconnected intellectual abstractions studied within this book, the medium of the letter allows for a wide variation in scale: one can easily place several evocations of hydrology within a single text, cultivating a macrotextual rhetorical corpus, but also retaining isolated textual moments in which a specific nuance is explored. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and yet the parts remain wholes in themselves. Instead of attempting to capture an entire self-contained thought-world in a single evocation of aqueous imagery, Peter makes use of water as a rhetorical *color* with many variations. Water, as a distinct register of rhetorical expression, is extremely versatile and engages imaginatively with scriptural typology, spatiality, motion, nutrition, germination, and the cyclicity of nature, to name but a few. Water is rich and flexible, flowing through the mind as ink flows across the page from the nib of a quill. The multivocality of water bridges the boundaries between ideas, transcends scales of being, and allows for great rhetorical agility. Peter presents a glimpse into a world seldom seen in such vivid detail: the hidden correspondence of the twelfth-century letter-writing com-

<sup>69</sup> Witt, 'The Arts of Letter-Writing', p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> Introduction, in Leclercq, *La Spiritualité de Pierre de Celle*, pp. 18–19.

munity. As Mary Carruthers has dedicated a great deal of research to demonstrating, the likeness of something experienced appears within the realm of abstraction as an enabling device for comprehension and memory. In the unique realm of the letter, every sentence is precious, crafted with precision as a gift for the intended recipient or recipients.

In the monastic realm — predicated as it was upon strategies of non-verbal communication and dependent as it was upon the tools of inner contemplation — a complex image for the apprehension of truths great and small is a great gift indeed. Peter was a skilled rhetorician in all endeavours, and yet his epistolary practice presents a vast collection of views into a shared imagining, into a landscape walked by the minds of the monastic communities. Within such a world, the endless dynamism of water brought new ideas into the realm of comprehension, infusing intellectual life with a pouring forth of good words.

What can we learn from this expression of monastic thought? First, it is certainly an episode of image-making in practice and illuminates many subtleties in the relationship between materiality and abstract image. In a world of correspondence predicated upon the efficacy of its abstractions, it is valuable to undertake a sustained analysis of the process by which images communicate abstract meaning. Secondly, it demonstrates the unique material and structural qualities of water in the practice of rhetoric. It supports the notion that simply mapping biblical allusions and classical tropes is not sufficient grounds for an understanding of the imagination at work, both within letter writing and within a wider milieu of abstract communication. There is something mercurial and yet redolent of natural patterns within non-figurative abstract imagery. Thirdly, it demonstrates the point that has often been made regarding Peter of Celle by highlighting the skill of his epistolary style. Beyond content, Peter was a truly committed communicator, seeking to illuminate the inner world with the enlivening and vivifying power of words.

Finally, Peter and his letters demonstrate with great clarity that textual communities are not about sharing ideas alone, but can to some extent create a shared simulation of moral life generated through iterative rhetorical expressions — a world that can be entered and explored on different scales, moving through heterogeneous spaces. Through the medium of the letter, the reader and writer can co-compose a world shaped from the stuff of nature. The waters of good words, like the flow of a river, bring life to every corner of this world, nourishing the carefully cultivated pieces of wisdom cultivated therein. Letter writing is a process of transaction, and yet the flowing riparian bonds that bond disparate minds together demonstrate that this transfer is not occasional or staccato, but continuous. A system of epistolary communication, like a river system, brings life when it flows with freedom and restriction, and yet leads to aridity and interior depletion when interrupted.



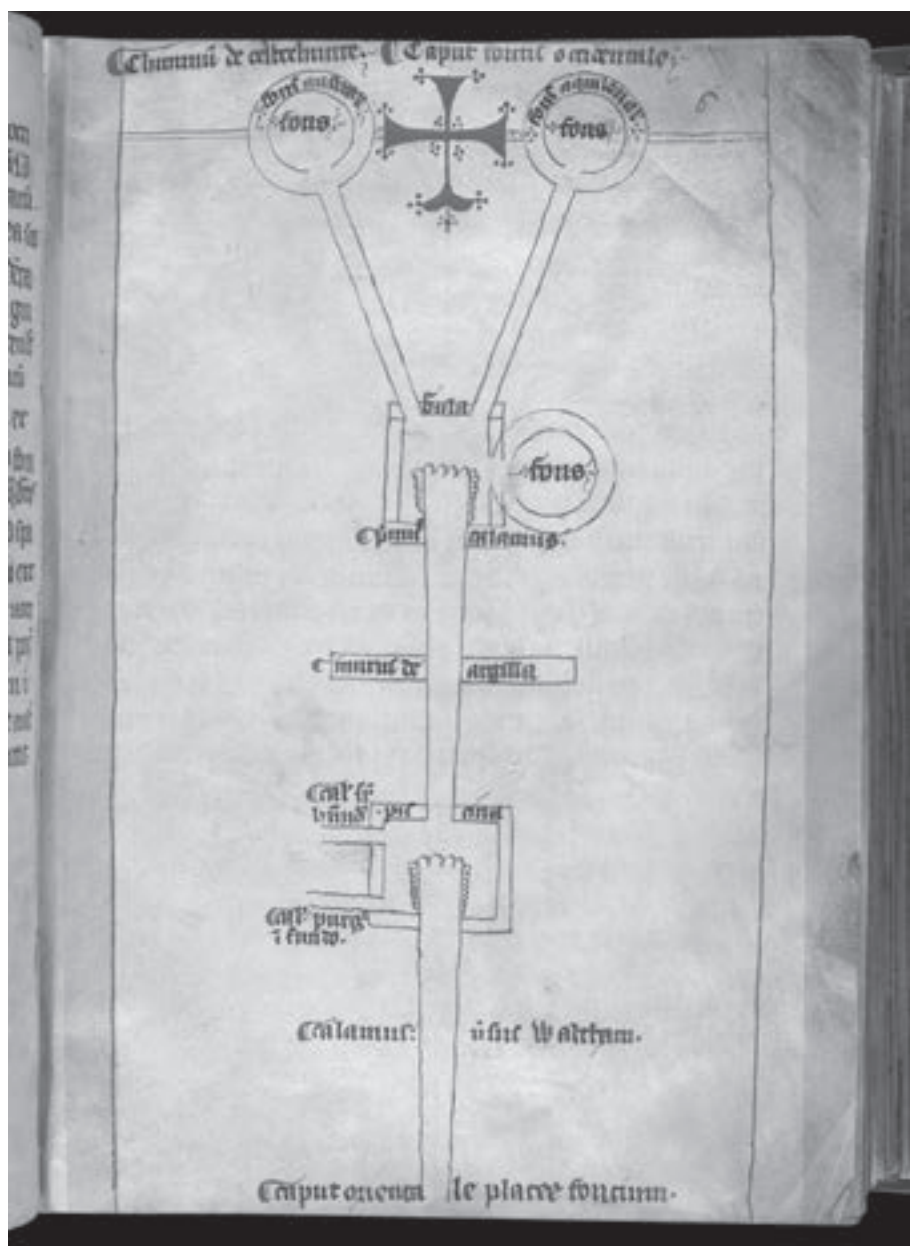


Figure 7. 'British Library Manuscript Harley 391, Waterworks of Waltham Abbey (Abbey Cartulary)', London, British Library, MS Harley 391, fol. 6r. Thirteenth century. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

‘TO SERVE YOU AS A MIRROR’: SPIRITUAL  
TOPOGRAPHY AND MONASTIC WATERSCAPE IN  
*A DESCRIPTION OF CLAIRVAUX*

Monastic narratives, in addition to their power to exemplify moral behaviour, also served as a key tool in the memorialization and self-explanation of the environment. For the Cistercian Order of the twelfth century, scarcely established following their break from the greater Benedictine movement, the telling of landscape stories was not only a form of praise of the purity and simplicity of their prayer, toil, and seclusion, but the practice of a powerful and endlessly circular hermeneutic of spiritual place, space, and motion. To be Cistercian was to shape a rich and devotional inner space in contradistinction to an austere exterior — at least such was the rhetoric of self-characterization. Furthermore, to be Cistercian was to shape the landscape to serve as a vehicle for the cultivation of inner space, and to shape inner space in communion with the environment in turn. The role of hydrology in this process was twofold. Bodies of water such as rivers served the community and gave them the means of industry, subsistence, and eventually wealth. Within a rich vocabulary of inner abstraction, waterways were also conduits for the flow of spiritual force within and the industry, subsistence, and wealth of the soul.

In the following chapter, I explore a monastic hydrology that is abstract and material in equal measure. Elizabeth Freeman has argued that it is impossible to fully understand Cistercian spiritual practices without the context of the *res gestae*

found within their historical record, and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> It is equally true that narratives of daily life such as the primary source material for this chapter are incomprehensible without spiritual context, and that this context is conversely difficult to understand without recourse to historical narrative. More specifically, the chapter interprets a waterscape with textual and landscape dimensions in which the bonds of monastic landscape as lived experience and monastic space as abstraction of mental and spiritual life merge in a dense web of interpretations and influences. It asks, as Ellen Arnold puts it, 'how nature informed cultural metaphors, how it shaped the monks' religious identity, and how religious culture in turn influenced how the monks acted in their landscape, and used their resources'.<sup>2</sup>

Monastic landscape-eloquence is particularly evident, and particularly fruitful for reading, within the textual treatment of water. These expressions of a space or spaces enlivened by water constantly and commodiously imply mystical and moral meaning, and yet interact with nature on a mundane and practical level. The effect of this process is a monastic landscape-consciousness in which hydrology participates in daily life and an implied cosmic order in equal measure. The resulting space is a *locus sanctissimus*, shaped and defended by its monastic inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> The river, in this context, infuses a space that is holy, useful, pleasant, and testing in equal measure, providing sacred balm, labour, enjoyment, and challenge. By reading those texts created by monastic orders — the Cistercians, in the case of this chapter — in order to narrate the meaning of landscape, we can aspire to a historical and a literary goal: the former an exploration of Cistercian thought, the latter an exploration of the intersections of environment and literature within Cistercian textual practice.

The establishment of an interrelated hydrology is often evident within monastic narration of spiritual abstraction using the language of landscape. Once this process has occurred, constructs of thought appear that show the signs of this natural engagement; ideas become hydrologically charged. A good example occurs in the sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx, in which a vision of paradise is linked to the internal landscape of the soul:

If we should wish, my brothers, to have this [second] Adam [Jesus Christ] dwell in our heart, we must there prepare a paradise for him. May the soil of our heart be

<sup>1</sup> Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this process in the monastery of Cluny, see Harris, 'Building Heaven on Earth', p. 132.

fertile and fecund, abounding in virtues like spiritual trees. May the Spirit be there, like a never-failing fountain which irrigates us spiritually with grace, devotion, and all sorts of spiritual delight. May the four virtues be there, like four rivers which wash us clean of all the grime of vice and render us unsullied and unstained. All this so that we may be fit for the Lord's embrace!<sup>4</sup>

Aelred's garden is within and without in equal measure, bringing the topography of paradise to the monastic experience, and the imagery of the material abbey to the invisible world of the spirit.<sup>5</sup> The image works on three levels, for it is an image of the earthly paradise, an evocation of a real monastic landscape, and a figure for the space of the individual soul. In this case, the already familiar fountain trope forms the primary focal point. The soul-as-garden is a reflection on both the potential of the landscape to influence the qualities of the soul and the potential of the soul, through the causative nature of its similarity to the garden, to flourish with careful cultivation. The resonance with the *Song of Songs* is strong within this trope. Guerric of Igny plays upon the theme in a similar vein:

As I see it, the man who enters the Lord's garden becomes a garden himself; his soul is like a watered garden, so that the Bridegroom says in his praise: 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride.' Gardens they surely are, those in whom the gardener's words come true [...] saying: 'Listen to me, slips of the divine stock: bloom like the rose that is planted by the watercourse; give off a sweet smell of incense, blossom like the lily'.<sup>6</sup>

Through this process, the causative nature of medieval metaphor superimposes Edenic waters, natural waters, and spiritual movements. The result is a world in which the physical is coextensive with the abstract, a quality expressed within literature and philosophy to great effect. As the rivers of the arts represent the rivers of Eden and Jerusalem through the typological links of the *Fons philosophiae*, so too does this chapter merge biblical and spiritual patterns with the space of thought and religious imagination.

In a letter to Bishop Alexander of Lincoln penned c. 1129, Bernard of Clairvaux proclaimed that 'Clairvaux is itself Jerusalem', and 'it is one with the Jerusalem in

<sup>4</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, Sermon 39:18, as cited in Sommerfeldt, *Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, pp. 122–23.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4 for a repetition of the *topoi* of spiritual irrigation and spiritual purification by Peter of Celle.

<sup>6</sup> Guerric of Igny, 'From a Sermon for Arousing Devotion at Psalmody (No. 54)', trans. by Matarasso, p. 136.

heaven in wholehearted devotion of the mind, in similarity of life, and in spiritual kinship'.<sup>7</sup> As with the two cities of Augustine's *City of God*, there were two realms in which humanity could reside: the worldly city, Babylon, or the heavenly city, Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> By tying the aqueous components of this trope — the rivers of paradise flowing from a Trinitarian source into the diverse corners of time and space — to monastic spaces, salvation was expressed by the arrangement of the landscape. In such a space, every act was meaningful, every change significant, every connection morally charged. This process became even more complicated in the act of narrative, fixing the perceptions of these bonds in text, and shaping abstract entities of ecological form. Through this image, Clairvaux became more than landscape; it became a vehicle of hermeneutics. The landscape, shaping and shaped by Bernard and his order, came to life, one with Jerusalem and yet engaged in the temporal. It was, as Alfred Siewers has termed it, an 'overlay landscape', in which '[an] engaging story is overlaid in effect on physical topography and geographical features to produce a reciprocally formed culture and nature of place'.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter explores the shaping of and encounter with the landscape of Clairvaux Abbey, a space that is in the process of being modified or has been modified by humans, and yet seems controlled by a more than human power — the landscape modifies the modifier. The argument will be broken into three key components: a study of the hydrological register — the collection of *colores* and tropes — a study of the monastery, and a study of the monastery grounds as an exploration of this hydrology. The textual subject of this chapter is the anonymous *Descriptio positionis seu situationis monasterii Clarae-vallensis* (Description of the Arrangement or Position of Clairvaux Monastery), an admiring twelfth-century description of the famous Cistercian abbey and its grounds.<sup>10</sup> In her preface to the source, Pauline Matarasso notes that '[t]he author could have been a frequent visitor to Clairvaux or a member of the community', and that 'by the way he writes and from the fact

<sup>7</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Letter 64: To Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln c. 1129', trans. by Evans, p. 282.

<sup>8</sup> As Bernard of Clairvaux put it, '*Inter Babylonem et Ierusalem nulla est pax, sed guerra continua*' (between Babylon and Jerusalem there is no peace, but continual war). Cited in Bruun, *Parables*, p. 210.

<sup>9</sup> Siewers, 'Pre-Modern Ecosemiotics', p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> The *Descriptio positionis seu situationis monasterii Claraevallensis* can be found in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXXV, col. 569 (retrieved via *Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database*), and has been translated into English by Pauline Matarasso ('A Description of Clairvaux', pp. 287–92).

that he feels no need to establish his bona fides, the latter seems the more likely'.<sup>11</sup> In the *Descriptio*, aqueous features — rivers, ponds, springs, and the technologies of their management — are described by the author in a manner that blurs the literal, the allegorical, and the anagogical to such an extent that a truly hybrid hydrology is formed. The goal of this chapter is to establish a framework for reinterpreting Cistercian thought in light of its deployment of nature-textuality, and to focus on the manner in which the waterscape feeds into such an analysis. Furthermore, it describes and interprets an abstract hydrology shaped by and informing monastic thought-structures.

### *Mental Image and Cistercian Landscape*

Imagination of the abbey landscape collapses the spiritual and quotidian within the landscape, bringing the resonances of Eden into the world of the human, and the human into alignment with the Edenic tropes of landscape. The result is a constructed expression of what is defined as 'third nature' in the terminology of ecosemiotics, an 'entirely theoretical or artistic, non-natural nature-like nature'.<sup>12</sup> Distinct from 'zero nature' or nature as a thing-in-itself, this abstract hydrology is a cultural emanation of natural experience. Always tied to a phenomenal nature by experience, it is an unnatural nature mediated by the language of experiential nature. As the following section will propose, the ingredients of a hydrological third nature derive from a dense interconnection of biblical trope, salvation symbol, allegory, social expression, and daily experience. Kull defines a third nature as an 'image from image' projection, using the example of reading about nature in a book or viewing it on a twenty-first-century television screen, and the narrated nature of Cistercian foundation literature conforms to this model.<sup>13</sup> It is an ecological imagining through the medium of a text that is itself derived from a more immediate image fashioned from natural engagement.

It is, to my mind, a productive exercise to read the monastery and its landscape setting as a negotiation between the ordering and regulation of material space, and the liberation of abstract space from the constraints of literal expression.<sup>14</sup> Scholars

<sup>11</sup> Matarasso's introduction to 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 285.

<sup>12</sup> Kull, 'Semiotic Ecology', p. 355.

<sup>13</sup> Kull, 'Semiotic Ecology', pp. 356–57.

<sup>14</sup> Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, p. 1.

have commented upon a hidden force within the symbolic makeup of the monastery, a desire to place the stamp of its spirituality upon the pre-existing landscape.<sup>15</sup> A notable example of this position is presented by Antonio Sennis:

A community's inclination to control and organize the surrounding landscape — which was reflected in the frequent reference to a monastery as the place (*locus*) par excellence was, as well as having some direct administrative purposes, also justified by the fact that, in the monastic mentality, secular space had a meaning only insofar as it was purged by the presence of a monastery. In addition, a monastery was a sacred place, the point of intersection between the material and spiritual worlds, and as such, a place of power.<sup>16</sup>

For the Cistercian Order, we can take this claim further still by positing a more complex and reciprocal cycle: Cistercians read meaning in the landscape, but also modified the landscape to produce further meanings, and conceived of themselves in turn as spiritualized by the landscape. Although modern readers may see the monastery as a landscape, complete with all the traits that define it as such for us, we can learn a great deal by breaking the monastery down into a series of moralized *loci* that fit comfortably within monastic thought.<sup>17</sup> The *Descriptio* reveals a distinctly medieval space or collection of spaces within the monastery, a place in which meaning flowed between the spiritual and material realms, carrying with it the abstract impressions hidden within topographical imagination.

Chris Fitter describes four key drives or matrices present within landscape perception: the *ecological* (subsistence and security), the *cosmographic* (world-order, agency, and structure), the *analogical* (similarity and symbolicity) and the *technoptic* (learned codes of experience and aesthetics).<sup>18</sup> Only when these four matrices have been merged do we gain a truly holistic perspective and understanding of the world that surrounds us. Previous studies of monastic landscape-consciousness have often focused more on the ecological nature of the monastery, its role as a grower of crops, maker of goods, and economic power, or the cosmographic

<sup>15</sup> See Althoff and others, *Medieval Concepts of the Past*; Horn, 'Water Power and the Plan of St Gall'; Sennis, 'Narrating Places'.

<sup>16</sup> Sennis, 'Narrating Places', p. 276.

<sup>17</sup> In their introduction to '*Anglo-Saxon Horizons*', Clare Lees and Gillian Overing observe that 'the notion of "landscape" is post-medieval, but that of locus or place is thoroughly medieval — a familiar element of monastic habits of thought and knowledge'. Lees and Overing, '*Anglo-Saxon Horizons*', p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 15.



and purely abstract theological practices of its inhabitants. This is by no means an inaccurate picture of monastic life, yet it is strangely incomplete; there is also a two-fold and reciprocal interaction of the cosmographic and ecological that, through analogy, is imbued with a 'technoptic' meaning. Fitter proposes that "landscape-consciousness" with all its apparent "immediacies" of perception always in fact subsists within broader, historically local structures of "nature-sensibility" that condition, direct and limit it'.<sup>19</sup> The 'landscape-consciousness' of the monastic orders, in this schema, extended beyond the realm of agriculture and economy into contemplation of the link between humanity and God. The monastery was an expressive 'ecosemiosphere', a meaningful, physical environment that functioned as a 'nature-text' intimately bonded to physical environment.<sup>20</sup>

In order for a vision of paradise to be realized once more within the soul, the cosmographical model of the lost Eden was replicated within the material world. Through the duplication of the garden within the landscape of medieval Europe, we may see the 'otherworldly' becoming 'less other'.<sup>21</sup> Still a transcendent symbol, the essence of Eden was no longer locked in an inaccessible past, forever consigned to be something that humanity had possessed, strictly in the past tense.<sup>22</sup> It could break into the present tense, allowing for the gardens of the world to be experienced as a moment of paradise still extant within a world accessible to humanity, even if the form and inspiration remained hidden. The remediation of space within the monastery brought the monk, the community, and even the landscape out of the *regio dissimilitudinis* of temporality and into a closer relationship or similitude to the unity of God.<sup>23</sup> The past of Eden and the future of Jerusalem were brought into the present, collapsing the schism of temporality and shaping a space for the healing of the Fall.

To escape from the trap of dissimilitude from God within the temporal landscape, a spiritual egress was required through a seeking of self-knowledge. A self-reflective reading of landscape, especially landscape in the form of a could-be paradise, encouraged this process. The symbolism of paradise had been that of 'a realm

<sup>19</sup> Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Siewers, 'Pre-Modern Ecosemiotics', p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 226.

<sup>22</sup> To further quote Fitter, 'its reality, like that of Cathay [China], remains marvellous yet becomes more concretely predictable'. Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 226.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of Bernard of Clairvaux's parable of spiritual movement from the *regio dissimilitudinis*, the great gulf waiting to swallow the carnal, into the Castle of Wisdom, see Bruun, *Parables*, pp. 188–99.

utterly heterogeneous, sublimely incommensurable', and a temporal landscape could become an anticipation of paradise.<sup>24</sup> As Fitter claims, the alteration of the landscape is a divine amelioration of dissimilitude through labour:

Monastic penetration, clearance and planting of wilderness on this view may be not merely a propaedeutic to paradise regained, but itself the paradisaical state anticipated. Thus, in some degree, it may be said that nature exists *in potentia*, and that man not only inhabits the universe, but as God's agent co-creates it.<sup>25</sup>

This is an example of what Howe and Wolfe described as a 'specific cosmic resonance' of the medieval landscape.<sup>26</sup> No longer wilderness yet not a city, the monastery occupied a position somewhere between the two. By building and cultivating their monasteries, the monks of the Latin West were in a unique position: they were at liberty to shape their landscape for salvific purposes, and through this process to imagine their role within it.<sup>27</sup> As a result, participation in the shaping of landscape was, on another level of interpretation, a spiritual and moral shaping. The landscape, once so altered, spoke in turn of its implied meaning to new interpreters. It resonated, as Howe and Wolfe put it, with the human and the divine.

Through one strong thread of symbolism, the abbey represented that which was to come: the City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the new Eden.<sup>28</sup> It is, in its abstract sense, a symbol of heaven on earth within the landscape of the surrounding monastery with all of its 'attendant hierarchies' included.<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of this argument, I extend this symbolism outward to include the aqueous elements of interest to this book. Monastic imagination gazed both backwards and forward in time, memorializing the lost blessings of a paradise now passed from human experience, while simultaneously anticipating the new paradise of the heavenly Jerusalem (both examples of analogical and cosmographic imagination in equal

<sup>24</sup> Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 226.

<sup>25</sup> Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape*, p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> Howe and Wolfe, 'Introduction', p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> See Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; DeLue, and Elkins ed., *Landscape Theory*; Howe, 'Creating Symbolic Landscapes'; Killian, *The Landscapes of Saint-Pierre d'Orbais*; Schama, *Landscape and Memory*; Tuan, 'Thought and Landscape', pp. 89–102.

<sup>28</sup> In *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, Megan Cassidy-Welch presents a convincing argument that within the monastery, the material space of the church existed as an architectural representation of the heavenly Jerusalem described within the vision of Saint John, in which it is described as a building. Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, p. 92.

measure). Paradise could be seen, in the words of William McClung, as 'a garden at one end of time and a city at the other', remote from human memory yet constantly remembered.<sup>30</sup> Thus, any change to the landscape, such as building, cultivation or hydraulic engineering, may be imagined as a change towards the image of the garden-city. Bernard of Clairvaux exclaimed, 'truly the cloister is a paradise, a realm protected by the rampart of a discipline that contains a rich abundance of priceless treasures'.<sup>31</sup>

Matthew of Rievaulx (then precentor of the abbey) described his monastery as an Eden within the landscape: 'Paradise is among us here', he claimed, 'in spiritual exercise, simple prayer and holy meditation'.<sup>32</sup> Yet it was a paradise compromised, surviving in a fallen world between heaven and earth.<sup>33</sup> As a result, alteration of the landscape to bring it into greater correspondence with paradise was imagined as not only desirable, but as an allegory for and facilitator of essential spiritual growth. The symbolic *topos* of the garden enclosed is of particular interest in the study of monastic imagination. Miller argues that '[t]he memory of the prelapsarian garden, the terrestrial paradise, and its central feature, the fountain reaching to the four corners of the earth, was perpetuated and transformed [into new forms] in the Middle Ages'.<sup>34</sup> The landscape, in this fashion, became a vehicle of salvation symbolism, a road map for internal and abstract triumphs within the soul. Through the outflowing of the fountain or spring and the flow of the river, the message of Eden could be carried into the world. Hildegard of Bingen claimed that, 'it is through the little brook springing from stones in the east that other bubbling waters are washed clean, for it flows more swiftly. Besides, it is more useful than the other waters because there is no dirt in it'.<sup>35</sup> Impurities were purged in this paradise; contemplating it sharpened one's powers of imagination, and brought about its realization in the next life.<sup>36</sup>

Within the monastery, we find the symbolic subset of the fountain. The walls of Eden protected the garden, the plants represented its bounty, yet it was the spring within the *locus amoenus* that generated and enabled. The four sides of the square

<sup>30</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Delumeau and O'Connell, *History of Paradise*, p. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings*, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, 'Paradise Regained', pp. 137.

<sup>35</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. by Fox, p. 292.

<sup>36</sup> Otten, *From Paradise to Paradigm*, pp. 25–26.

cloister recalled the four rivers of Eden, the four gospels, and the four cardinal virtues. It was from this point that the essence of the spiritual life flowed, the locus at which the hidden essence of the cosmos entered the landscape. It became a welling up and out-flowing manifestation of life and its symbolic purification and renewal through the auspices of grace.<sup>37</sup>

The merging of spiritual realms revealed waters that, although hidden, could be brought forth into the confines of the cloister, watering the souls of the monks who resided there. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that 'the object of monks is to seek out not the earthly but the Heavenly Jerusalem, and this is not by proceeding with [their] feet but by progressing with [their] feelings'.<sup>38</sup> It was a structured approach to the problem of human imperfection, a fortress of faith and industry with an internal and protected spiritual state 'growing' within its heart. In the words of Paul Piehler, the imposition of the city into the landscape fortified the mind, creating a city within to mirror the city without:

As a result of his victories [over the wilderness], the fundamental distinction of human landscape into city and wilderness, known and unknown, undergoes a profound modification: the polarity, once identical in both internal and external consciousness, begins to separate into a physical and psychic dimension, as it becomes possible for man to bear into the wilderness a city within himself.<sup>39</sup>

Keith Lilley has proposed that one of the possible 'mappings' of the medieval cityscape makes use of 'textual and visual representations which show that the city was understood as a scaled-down world — a microcosm — linking city and cosmos in the medieval mind'.<sup>40</sup> When applied to the 'ideal' and 'final' city form of the heavenly Jerusalem, we see a contracted version of a world to come, the ultimate iteration of cosmic order. The city was ontologically significant, connecting the earthly (human) body with the heavenly (cosmic) body.<sup>41</sup> The human and cosmic principles were points on a progression of salvation narrative spanning the whole of Creation. Only when time itself ended could this process come to its conclusion.

Transformed from the unelaborated natural image of the first Eden, the monastery was an 'accommodation with the city', a garden-city fortified against the rav-

<sup>37</sup> Russell, *A History of Heaven*, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Letter 399, to Lebert, abbot of St. Michael, as cited in Connolly, 'Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris', p. 598.

<sup>39</sup> Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape*, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Lilley, 'Cities of God?', p. 296.

<sup>41</sup> Lilley, 'Cities of God?', p. 303.

ages of the Fall. A garden enclosed by a mighty city, the crystalline and celestial perfection of the New Jerusalem formed its ultimate inspiration. The elaboration of the first paradisaic spring, symbolically represented by the river and its trees within the eternal city, now completed its course.<sup>42</sup> Within the grounds of the monastery, the cloisters and the greenery were a garden enclosed, a paradisaic *topocosm*. *Clastrum* implies a 'closed' space, barring the outside world. The fountain or well at the centre of this space, whether artificial or natural, mirrored the geography of Eden.<sup>43</sup> The space or spaces of the monastery, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, 'were not places where one sought for pleasant views nor were they designed as a setting to flatter the human ego'.<sup>44</sup> Both the cloister within and the fields and gardens without were an amelioration of landscape, a conscious effort to concentrate the reversal of human error and thus transform the world.

### *Abstract Hydrology and Nature-Textuality*

Just as a river flows from a single source and peregrinates to diverse destinations, the rivers of paradise spread across the space, time, and history of the medieval world, and the gospels were thought to spread from the teachings of Christ. In a similar manner, the text tradition of the primitive Cistercian Order follows a riverine pattern, moving in a one-to-many branch.<sup>45</sup> In the following case study, I explore the anonymous *Descriptio* as a nature-text expressing the Cistercian overlay of abstract and material. Within this nature-text, an abstract hydrology — complete with a full structural logic — is embedded. I approach this text as a significant piece of environmental literature in its own right. I analyse its hydrological registry for insights into Cistercian thought in particular, and high medieval environmental consciousness in general.

Ellen Arnold has proposed that 'medieval authors created continuity between practice and interpretation', and that those seeking to understand monastic environmental history must investigate the manner in which medieval ideas intersect

<sup>42</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 138.

<sup>45</sup> It is important to make the caveat that speaking of a 'Cistercian Order' is somewhat dubious at this point in the twelfth century. As Constance Hoffman Berman has demonstrated, it was not until the late twelfth or early thirteenth century that we can truly speak of any kind of discrete 'order'. See Hoffman Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*.

with medieval environmental management.<sup>46</sup> Within the story of Cistercianism, we can discern the intermingling of management and ideology from the first instance. The Order, as is the case in its subsequent history, began with a cascade of reforms. Within the *Exordium magnum* of Konrad of Eberbach, the foundation of Cîteaux and the subsequent daughter houses is rendered in hydrological terms:

Here begins the narrative of the beginning of the Cistercian Order, how our fathers left the monastery of Molesme in order to recover the purity of the Order according to the Rule of St Benedict and founded the fertile house of Cîteaux which is the mother of all our houses, since from her, *as if from the purest fountain, the rivers of all the churches of our Order flow.*<sup>47</sup>

Konrad, by imagining the story of Cistercian growth as the flow of a great river of piety and vivification, propagated one of the most significant and dearly held tropes of his order, a specifically Cistercian world of water. This particular world of water, both quotidian and metaphysical, merged the biblical, the spiritual, and the rhetorical in equal measure. Roberta Magnusson discusses the manner in which 'God's ordered creation could be understood and mastered by man, and man's own creative activities took on religious significance through their relationship to God's work' during the flowering of monasticism in the High Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup> The *Descriptio* is a narrative expression of this recursivity, describing engineering in spiritual terms, and spirituality in the language of hydraulics. Magnusson also cites Konrad, who grandly stated that 'like a great lake whose waters pour out through a thousand streams, gathering impetus from their rapids, the new monks [of the Cistercian Order] went fourth from Cîteaux to people the West'.<sup>49</sup>

In Walter Daniel's *Life of Aelred*, the description of the valley chosen for the monastery of Rievaulx is a paradise. Cradled by hills, whose 'wooded delights' afforded the monks 'a kind of second Eden', the valley through which the River Rie flowed offered a vision of divine bounty.<sup>50</sup> Within this new Eden, we see the Cistercian interpretation of nature in human terms begin, as a place for humanity to re-enact better days:

<sup>46</sup> Arnold, 'Engineering Miracles', p. 496.

<sup>47</sup> My italics. Konrad of Eberbach, *Exordium magnum Cisterciense sive narratio de initio Cisterciensis Ordinis*, ed. by Griesser. The translation is taken from Burton and Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages*, p. 7. As cited in Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 182.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Daniel, in William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, 'From the *Vita prima*', trans. by Matarasso, p. 154.

Spring waters come tumbling down from the highest rocks to the valley below, and, threading their way down narrow clefts and gullies, they widen out to rivulets and rills, uniting the murmur of their softly purling voices in a sweet concert of harmonious sound. And when the branches of the lovely trees clash and part with a rhythmical sighing as the leaves flutter gently to the ground, the blissful listener enjoys a wealth of jubilant harmony and his receptive ears are charmed by so sweet a blending of tumultuous sound, where each of the myriad different notes is yet musically equal to the rest.<sup>51</sup>

The clamour of the temporal works subsided and the melodies of a more perfect and earlier world could be heard, ameliorating the spiritual harshness of human life with a partial image of paradise. In their more rigorous practice of the Rule of Saint Benedict and the increasing focus on prayer over labour, the Cistercian brothers turned their eyes to the heavens, and sought to cultivate a place on earth conducive to heavenly thoughts.

The flow of monks and ideas into the landscape of twelfth-century Europe found a space in which the waters flowed in turn throughout the landscape. Spreading from a single motherhouse into every corner of Europe, the growth of monastic sites followed a repeating pattern of multiple transformations. William of Saint-Thierry writes that 'just as rivers return to the place from which they arise, so either [Bernard's] sons' glad news or their sorrowful news comes back to him daily' — the Cistercian community was linked like the branches of a great river flowing from its head in Cîteaux and the other mother houses of the Order.<sup>52</sup> With the spread of the Order went the spread of technology, for 'the rapid and widespread diffusion of the Cistercian Order was followed by a rapid and widespread diffusion of hydraulic technology, in a kind of institutional cloning', as Magnusson puts it.<sup>53</sup> When monasteries proliferated, the hydraulic engineers spread also, a cadre of professional craftsmen within the ranks of the lay brothers, and choir monks with architectural knowledge such as Geoffrey d'Ainai, sent by Bernard to instruct the new English community at Fountains in hydraulic technology.<sup>54</sup>

Within their self-narrative, the Cistercians sought out spaces within the landscape untouched by Christian intervention, *loci horribiles* of wilderness and horror within which to do battle, but also *loci amoeni* to transform with Christian

<sup>51</sup> Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred*, trans. by Matarasso, pp. 154–55.

<sup>52</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Costello, 1:63, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Magnusson, *Water Technologies in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Magnusson, *Water Technologies in the Middle Ages*, p. 13.



resonance. This was an imagining heavy with rhetoric, and tells us more about the desired self-imagination of Cistercianism than the actuality of landscape use. The reality of the situation was far from idyllic, and yet the moral imagining of landscape purity had great power. The imagining of landscape, no matter how fanciful, had a profound effect on monastic life.

The sanctification of labour for the early brothers and *conversi* transformed toil against the wilderness into a strongly symbolic act. Konrad of Eberbach recounted the dream of a lay brother in which he was plowing a field. In this dream, the brother was not alone, for Christ walked at his side behind the plow, assisting him in his labours.<sup>55</sup> The cultivation of the landscape, like the cultivation of the soul, is undertaken with the assistance of Christ, the 'interior teacher'. By making internal and external striving analogous through metaphorical likeness, the onerous nature of labour as a punishment for the Fall (the sweat of the brow) is absent. This is a motif echoed within the *Description of Clairvaux* of William of Saint-Thierry:

I see them in the garden with hoes, in the meadows with forks or rakes, in the fields with scythes, in the forest with axes. To judge from their outward appearance, their tools, their bad and disordered clothes, they appear a race of fools, without speech or sense. But a true thought in my mind tells me that their life in Christ is hidden in the heavens.<sup>56</sup>

The monks labour within the landscape to cultivate their garden-city, yet the true garden grows within each cloistered soul.<sup>57</sup> This is the most strongly defined thread of symbolism within monastic daily life: the cultivation of the spirit into a garden of salvation. Once established, the landscape of the monastery was shaped into a stable form. The fallen influence was exorcized from the site of the abbey, and the establishment of a constantly inhabited and sacred space was reinforced through the daily activities of its inhabitants. The strict division of the Cistercian community between *conversi* and choir monks is also tellingly revealing, for the literature of monasticism — exclusive domain of the choir monk — appropriates physical labour as a spiritual metaphor. The abstraction of physical landscape was also a

<sup>55</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 181.

<sup>56</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Ogg, p. 260.

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence describes a story by Caesarius of Heisterbach in which the Virgin Mary, Saint Anne, and Saint Mary Magdalen 'had descended in a great flood of light to visit the monks of Clairvaux while they were toiling at the harvest [...] and had wiped the sweat from [their brows] and fanned them with their sleeves'. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 180.

discourse of exclusion, for the conversion of materiality into intellectual materiality gave the virtue of toil to thought, making the illiterate lay brothers a form of proxy exertion, an enactor of the physical acts that gave shape to intellectual space.

Once established, the symbolic meaning of the monastery landscape exhibited symbolism redolent of the self-conscious didacticism that framed its formation, impressing its message upon its future visitors and inhabitants. This meaning, although created through human narration and human landscape-consciousness, continued to influence subsequent visitors. This meaning was both remembered by subsequent inhabitants and modified by the re-performance of the memory. Remensnyder proposes that within the legendary tradition of monastic establishment '[consecrations] could be recalled and their meaning thus made continuously present' after the initial miraculous event.<sup>58</sup> Using the example of Lagrasse Abbey, Remensnyder describes a vision of Pope Leo III in which Christ consecrates the monastery, surrounded by a host of angels. As a consequence of this holy act, a quantity of holy water remains which cures three blind men as proof of its divine provenance. This water is then enclosed in an *ampulla* and placed on the altar, 'so that the water might always be kept in memory (*in memoria*)'.<sup>59</sup> The same might be said of whole waterscapes, once imbued with some miraculous force and then memorialized as sacred entity by the monks of the monastery. The legacy of sacredness remains — both in memory and in the form of miraculous potential — despite the holy event having passed.<sup>60</sup>

Through the monastic lifestyle, believed Saint Bernard, contemplative devotion would lead the soul beyond the outward appearances of worldly life into the lofty realm of divine things. The monastic landscape served to amplify this devotion, so that its inhabitants might transcend the senses and knowledge (*scientia*) of divinity to reach wisdom (*sapientia*) and full participation in the essence of God.<sup>61</sup> The text contains all the ideas outlined thus far, deliberately arranged to display the superlative qualities of every stone, river, patch of soil, and blade of grass. It offers an object for contemplation of spiritual life in which each part is related to every other, and to the whole. A journey through the dense interconnectivity of monastic life at Clairvaux reflects implicit interconnections within the inner life of the reader and author.

<sup>58</sup> Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> This raises the intriguing although tangential notion that monastic rivers become a form of persistent and self-renewing relic within nature.

<sup>61</sup> Linge, 'Mysticism, Poverty and Reason in the Thought of Meister Eckhart', p. 467.

### *Reading the Aube in the Description of Clairvaux*

Even more so than the Benedictine Order, the Cistercian Order embraced the goal of topographical and hydrographical transformation, presenting their monasteries as human and sacred in equal measure: ordered, managed, and intrinsically productive. It is particularly important to note that from the beginning, the *Descriptio positionis seu dispositionis monasterii Clarae-vallensis* (as Migne named it in the *Patrologia Latina*) frames its narrative not as an allegory, nor as a story, but as something reflecting the true nature of the monastery.<sup>62</sup> 'Should you wish to picture Clairvaux', the *Descriptio* begins, 'the following has been written to serve you as a mirror (*pro speculo*)'.<sup>63</sup> The device of the mirror or *speculum* is a significant one, for it frames the entire narrative not only as a hydrology, but also as a mirror for true interpretation in the tradition of the reflective summary. It is a way to look at (*specere*) an absent thing, captured within the reflective surface of the words. The use of the term implies an attempt to capture something that is universally true, hidden, and comprehensive within its subject matter, and to reflect it back to the reader.

In the case of Clairvaux, the hidden thing is the moral nature of the monastic landscape. To fully appreciate the 'reality' of the monastery, it is necessary to see it as more than hills, trees, waters, fields, industry, and buildings. Its reality is also moral, a set of valences, activities, imaginings, and behaviours embedded into the material landscape. The discerning use of speculation as a framing mode for the 'reflective' and holistic nature of the text combines with the reflective and fluid interconnection of its riverscape. Water was, after all, one of the clearest forms of visual self-reflection available before the advent of the modern mirror. Just as a 'mirror for princes' or a 'mirror for human salvation' reflects the character of the reader through an exposition on good and bad behaviour, so too did the *Descriptio* model a lens through which to view monastic landscape. By entering the landscape of Clairvaux and seeing its buildings, agriculture, industry, and waterscape as elements of a divine schema, the text and its fellows invite the reader to see themselves. If they were a monk of Clairvaux, it reflected a vision of a world that was not only an active monastery, but a vehicle of transformation in which the landscape and spirituality combined for a grand social and religious purpose.

<sup>62</sup> Title as listed in *Patrologia Latina*.

<sup>63</sup> 'Si situm Clarae-Vallis nosse desideras, haec tibi scripta sint pro speculo'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 567A. All English translations are from 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso. The Latin is presented as an aid to reading and interpretation.

The date of the text is unknown, and yet Pauline Matarasso draws an inference from the naming of the place as a 'latter Clairvaux', noting that the description of the monastery places it after 1135 when the elaborate hydraulic network was established in order to open up the acres on the opposite side of the River Aube.<sup>64</sup> In the quest to conjure a true image of Clairvaux within the mind of the reader, the anonymous author focuses not only on the natural site and physical location implied by *positio* (position), but also on the structural arrangement implied by *dispositio* (arrangement).

The monastic landscape described by the *Descriptio* was one of careful water management and industry, an ode to the ordered landscape shaped into being within the abbey grounds. The wooded valley site of Clairvaux, surrounded on both sides by rising hills, was watered both by an unpolluted spring found on higher ground and by the Aube. The Aube was diverted to run through the precincts of the abbey, re-joining its flow as it exited the site. The narrative describes the river entering the site, powering the mill and filling the brewery boiler, animating the water-powered trip-hammers that pound woollen cloth, flowing through the tannery and smithies, and exiting to the south, carrying the waste and byproducts in its wake. The pure spring poured from the wooded hills, flowing through the abbey grounds and joining the Aube as it flowed from the abbey site.<sup>65</sup> It was a world of industry and toil, but also beauty and quiet, Eden and Jerusalem merged into one. Each of the feats of hydraulic engineering described above is also moral, another facet of the hidden, abstract industry taking place in the minds of the monks.

Although the identity of our author is unknown, the intended audience of this text can be inferred from its narrative, as Matarasso has proposed. It is very much an evocation of a Cistercian landscape, and we can infer that this is likely to be *by* a Cistercian (quite possibly a brother of Clairvaux) and *for* Cistercians. Jean Leclercq claimed that monastic literature favoured 'actual happenings and experiences', and was 'addressed to a specific audience, to a public chosen by and known to the author'.<sup>66</sup> This is supported by Thomas Merton in his assertion that '[...] the whole

<sup>64</sup> As described by Arnald of Bonneval: see William of Saint-Thierry, Arnald of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, 'From the *Vita prima*', trans. by Matarasso, pp. 285–86.

<sup>65</sup> For the details of the site, see Leroux-Dhuys and Gaud, *Cistercian Abbeys*, pp. 46–48. For an excellent visualization of the site, see the video 'Abbaye de Clairvaux en 3D', a 2015 collaboration between le Département de l'Aube and Art Graphique & Patrimoine/Alcest Productions. In the video, the growth of the abbey is explored through a time-lapse visualization, showing the details of the buildings, waterworks, interiors, and the contextual history of the site (commentary and subtitles in French).

<sup>66</sup> Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, p. 153.

face of twelfth-century Europe was covered with Cistercian monks who were carrying as their greatest cross an insatiable homesickness for Clairvaux — the *nostalgia claravallensis*.<sup>67</sup> In craving a connection to one of their greatest founding houses, all Cistercians longed to be part of Clairvaux; a text such as the *Descriptio* would have helped them feel this proximity. This is significant for three reasons. First, this narrative of an experiential encounter with a landscape is not a work of pure speculation, but a practically grounded exposition with an implied abstract dimension. Secondly, it is an argument for the metaphysical purpose of Cistercian life, despite its idealized nature. Thirdly, the inference of a Cistercian audience allows us to see the manner in which abstract entities can be embedded within medieval narrative based upon an interpretation of personal experience, and can shape personal experience through the text. The result is a well-crafted device for exposition, as Matarasso eloquently describes:

Everything is fixed at the moment of perfection as in an illuminated manuscript. This is a landscape with figures, each one rich with meanings and allusions, a medieval canvas stretched on a classical frame, with Ovid peeping like a faun round a tree-trunk.<sup>68</sup>

The *Descriptio* begins with a now-familiar evocation of Clairvaux's paradisaical qualities mingled with an Ovidian air of Arcadian serenity.<sup>69</sup> Caught in a moment of perfect contemplation and yet lively with moral activity, the Clairvaux of the *Descriptio* is a paradise with a purpose. It still possesses all of the tropes of Eden — bounty, amenity, and spiritual care — and yet has additional and temporal qualities — utility, productivity, industry:

Duo montes non longe ab abbazia habent initium, qui primo angustae vallis interjectione distincti, quo magis ad abbatiam appropiant, majore hiatu fauces dilatant: quorum alter alterum abbatae latus dimidium, alter totum occupat. Alter fecundus vinearum, alter frugum fertilis, jucundum visui, et usui commodum ministerium praebebat: dum per deversa latera in altero crescit quod comedatur; quod bibatur, in altero.

(The Abbey covers the half of one hillside and the whole of the other. With one rich in vineyards, the other with crops, they do double duty, gladdening the heart and serving our necessities, one shelving flank providing food, the other drink.)<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Merton, *In the Valley of Wormwood*, p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 286.

<sup>69</sup> However, I reiterate, as I did in the introduction, that this seemingly static idyll 'painted' by the author begins to move and to develop once resuscitated within the mind of the reader as a mnemotechnical device.

<sup>70</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 569A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 269.

The resulting truth of Clairvaux is therefore an evocation of place and landscape, an evocation of structural utility, and a narrative of amenability to cultivation in equal measure. It is pleasant (*iucundus*) and yet also convenient (*commodus*). It echoes William of Saint-Thierry, who claimed in his *Vita prima* that 'the first thing those who came down from the hills surrounding Clairvaux would see was God in these houses', and that 'this silent valley spoke to them of the simplicity and humility of those living there'.<sup>71</sup> The landscape is both a place of joy due to its verdant and fecund soils and greenery, and a place of industry and productivity echoing the internal industry of monastic prayer. It matters not in the world of rhetoric if, as was often the case, the landscape was tended by an ancillary army of *conversi* or lay brothers; the industry echoed the spiritual strivings of the Cistercian Order. Although true paradise is impossible on earth, the corresponding enrichment of the soul through trial was clearly a path to heaven for those lacking the education, class, or inclination to be a choir monk. The monks (presumably *conversi*) in the *Descriptio* working the slopes of the valley surrounding the monastery were not simply collecting dead brushwood and burning brambles, but performing a spiritual purgation. The weeds have become the 'bastard slips (*spuria vitulamina*), which throttle the growing branches and loosen the roots'. These weeds must be removed, 'lest the stout oak be hindered from saluting the height of heaven'.<sup>72</sup> The monks are performing a day-to-day purgation of their paradise, lest the weeds of sin throttle the tender saplings of their spiritual life.

Hermits, monastic pioneers, and ascetics — at least within popular imagination — imagined the *locus horribilis* or place of horror and solitude as a space in which to test their holiness. Within this space, the *locus certaminis*, or place of trial, could be discovered, a recreation of Christ's battle with the wilderness of Judea on a personal or collective level. The goal was a landscape that both remained — at least rhetorically — a desert and yet signified paradise. In the *Vita prima* of Bernard of Clairvaux, the pre-establishment site was described as 'an ancient denizen of thieves and in antiquity [...] called the Valley of Wormwood, either because of the abundance of bitter wormwood or because of the bitter grief of those who fell into the hands of robbers'.<sup>73</sup> Through spiritual trial and the cleansing of evil, the

<sup>71</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Costello, 1.34, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 569B; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 287.

<sup>73</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Costello, 1.25, p. 29.

*locus amoenus* of Clairvaux was born, a recreation of paradise on earth, a landscape fit for the growth and nutrition of the human soul. Even weeds participate in this landscape's hydrology, for they are identical to cultivated plant life in all but one respect — they are not useful, and in some cases exactly the opposite. Rather than being nourished by good works and springing forth in a manner fitting to human use, they are instead nourished by wildness without intent, performing the role of all post-lapsarian vegetation: to impede human progress. All draw on the waters of the monastery, and yet it is the *telos* of plant life and not its origin that shapes the moral narrative.

Once facilitated by an act of sacrifice or a miracle, the edification or redemption of the landscape led to a corresponding spiritual edification, enabled by the outflowing of divine essence into the barren and fallow world left to humanity as a consequence of the Fall. Furthermore, by making the desert green, one could follow the example of the Lord when speaking to Isaiah, who said '[I] will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water'.<sup>74</sup> The unremitting moral allegory of this source is telling, for another of its salient traits is a preoccupation with water within the daily life of Clairvaux. The claim to offer a true mirror of Clairvaux is apparently a promise to present not only a reflection of what is true *visibly* within the monastery, but a sense of its moral, allegorical, and anagogical resonances in equal measure. To provide a mirror of Cistercian life that is truly representative of and to a medieval understanding of monasticism, it is necessary to narrate on multiple, simultaneous levels. On each level, the river of the monastery provides the crucial interrelationship of monastery and surrounds, nature and culture, labour and spirituality, time and space. The narrative journey follows the path of its riverscape, a form of physical and metaphysical positioning within the landscape.<sup>75</sup>

The river of the monastery plays a crucial role in the description of the abbey, existing at its heart and gifted with a lengthy description by the anonymous author. Tamed by the monks of the abbey and 'divided up by a network of streamlets' again, as the rivers of paradise divide into streams to water the whole world, the river becomes a typological equivalent of Christ watering the spiritual fruits of the abbey in abundance.<sup>76</sup> From one source to every corner, the waters of paradise were

<sup>74</sup> Isaiah 41. 18.

<sup>75</sup> David Macauley describes this as 'loco-motion' and 'local motion', circumscribing a territory by means of a journey through it. Macauley, 'Walking the Elemental Earth', p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> '... potius divisus rivulis intercurrentibus'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 570A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 288.



thought to pass into the temporal world and form the major rivers — so too does a hidden source of spiritual rectitude nourish the landscape of Clairvaux. The water is at work, for although it seems asleep (*[n]am licet aqua dormitans appareat*), it is in fact always gently slipping away (*pigro tamen decurrit elapso*).<sup>77</sup> Beneath a seemingly indolent surface, the river is filled with vitality ready to infuse and energize the monastery like life-blood.

Consequently, the hydrological dimension of the Clairvaux ecology presented in this text fills both the literal landscape and the spiritual landscape with a fluvial vitality. The energy of the waters — their nutrition of the crops, their figurative valence, and their ability to do hydraulic work — moves into the self-contained *oikos* of the monastery by pouring forth from the earth and running past the pleasant hills. If we return briefly to the salvific power of manual labour within Cistercian thought, the industry of the water is even more telling. The pushing and striving of the river on its way through the abbey creates industry from indolence in the manner of monks pushing and striving through life. An uncultivated wilderness of the soul lacks the directed power to strive spiritually, and the natural world responds to ordered control. Not only that but, as the *Descriptio* is at pains to emphasize, the natural world *wants* to work once redeemed from uselessness by the presence of a monastery. It is an abstracted and non-human practitioner of Cistercian life: ordered, industrious, moral, and chastened. As an agent in the role of the diligent Cistercian worker, the Aube brings forth produce from the land and cleans away its waste, performing functions with spiritual ramifications; it is human, hydraulic alteration that gives it this ability, and yet it acts independently. Furthermore, the river acts in a prelapsarian capacity, aiding and supporting human industry rather than thwarting it. The river elides human work on the landscape in favour of presenting the landscape element itself as a live, purposive agency, fulfilling the will and purposes of God.

We are told that '[t]his water, which serves the dual purpose of feeding the fish and irrigating the vegetables, is supplied by the tireless course of the river Aube, of famous name, which flows through the many workshops of the Abbey'.<sup>78</sup> 'Wherever it passes', the *Descriptio* continues, 'it evokes a blessing in its wake, proportionate to its good offices; for it does not slip through unscathed or at its leisure'. The river 'sends half its waters into the monastery, as though to greet the monks and

<sup>77</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 570A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 288.

<sup>78</sup> 'Aqua haec piscibus alendis, et rigandis oleribus duplici ministerio servit: cui Alba, famosi nominis fluvius, indefesso meatu fomenta ministrat'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 570A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 288.

apologize for not having come in its entirety, for want of a bed wide enough to carry its full flow'.<sup>79</sup> While the monks make use of the river for the production of wealth, we may also imagine the hydraulic systems at work within Clairvaux and other abbeys of its kind as a study in metaphysical imagination. Ellen Arnold identifies similar terminology in accounts of the monastery of Saint-Hubert, the canals of which were described as 'fit to serve monastic purposes or uses' (*ad diversos monasterii usus influit*).<sup>80</sup> Continuing, the author thanks God for the river: 'Deus bone, quanta pauperibus tuis procuras solatia, ne abundantiore tristitia absorbentur! quanta poenitentibus poenae alleviamenta dispensas, ne laboris violentia nonnunquam fortassis opprimantur!' (O Lord, how great are the consolations that you in your goodness provide for your poor servants, lest a greater wretchedness engulf them! How generously you palliate the hardships of your penitents, lest perchance they be crushed at times by the harshness of their toil!).<sup>81</sup> As a hybrid entity, the river and its surrounds are defined by rhetorically paradisaical, useful, and wild qualities in equal measure — it redeems and soothes, it offers trial and challenge, and it exhibits an inherent *usefulness*, either *in potentia* or in practice. This appears as a characteristically Cistercian trope in the later *exordia* of the Order. In the thirteenth-century *Exordium magnum*, for example, a new monastic landscape is turned to the building of mills, to fishing, and to the rearing of livestock, uses which 'man finds useful for diverse necessities'.<sup>82</sup> The *Descriptio* author ensures that the reader does not miss this point:

Ipse vero nobiscum participatur, nec aliud de labore suo, quo laborat sub sole, mercedis exspectat, quam ut, cum omnia diligenter perfecerit, liber permittatur abire. Tot ergo volubiles rotas rotatu rapido circumducens, sic spumeus exit, ut ipse quasi moli, et mollior fieri videatur.

([The river] is most truly shared with us, and expects no other reward wheresoever it toils under the sun than that, its work done, it be allowed to run freely away. So it

<sup>79</sup> 'quasi ad salutandum fratres, et se, quod totus non venerit, excusandum, quippe qui totius capax canale non invenit'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 570B; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 288.

<sup>80</sup> Arnold, 'Engineering Miracles', p. 495.

<sup>81</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 571B; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 289.

<sup>82</sup> 'ad facienda molendina, ad proprios tantum usus, et ad piscationem, equos etiam pecora que diuersa necessitatibus hominum utilia'. Konrad of Eberbach, *Exordium magnum Cisterciense*, ed. by Griesser, 1.20.103. My translation.

is that, after driving so many noisy and swiftly spinning wheels, it flows out foaming, as though it too has been ground and softened [like grain] in the process.)<sup>83</sup>

The industry of the monastery, powered by the commodious hydrology of the river, provides the goods that pure backbreaking labour cannot achieve, and in turn 'refines' nature, milling the waters into an entity of superior quality. Within the imagining of the *Descriptio*, the grinding of water-powered mills seeks to rhetorically purify wildness into a 'better' form of nature fit for human interaction.<sup>84</sup> This narrative process allegorizes the function of the mill, creating an evocation akin to that of the 'mystic mill' found on a capital within the abbey church at Vézelay. In this depiction, the 'grain of Moses', representing the Jewish law, is ground by Saint Paul into the flour of Christian spiritual insight, shedding the husks of transitory things.<sup>85</sup> In depicting the mill of Clairvaux as a processor of unrefined ideas, the narrative ties in to wider trope of Christian doctrine as the processing of raw material turned to new and fit purposes.

Within the text, the irrigation of the Aube creates a garden of fruit trees and burgeoning wildlife at the rear of the abbey, 'much of which lies inside the great sweep of the Abbey wall'.<sup>86</sup> Protected by the enfolding arms of the monastery-as-city, the garden may thrive safe from the depredations of the outside world. Within the *Descriptio*, these fruitful gardens, ideally situated near the infirmary, are a fitting balm for the sick. In a style of description fitting for a classical image of the *locus amoenus*, the gardens of Clairvaux are a shield against the harsh sun of life, creating a salvific shade for the healing of the soul:

Sedet aegrotus cespitem in viridi, et cum inclementia canicularis immiti sidere terras excoquit, et siccatur flumina, ipse in securitatem et absconsionem et umbraculum diei ab aestu, fronde sub arborea ferventia temperat astra: et ad doloris sui solatium, naribus suis gramineae redolent species. Pascit oculos herbarum et arborum amoena viriditas, et pendentes ante se, atque crescentes immensae ejus deliciae, ut non

<sup>83</sup> Ecclesiastes 1.3, in *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 571A–B; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 289.

<sup>84</sup> Although the technology of monastic hydraulics is not within the ambit of this argument, see Greene, *Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 109–32. For literature with descriptions of medieval water management practices, see Sayer, 'Medieval Waterways and Hydraulic Economics', pp. 134–50; TeBrake, 'Taming the Waterwolf', pp. 475–99.

<sup>85</sup> Ambrose, 'The "Mystic Mill" Capital at Vézelay', pp. 236–41.

<sup>86</sup> '... cujus partem non modicam murus occupat, qui abbatiam diffuso cingit ambitu'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 569B; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 287.

immerito dicat: Sub umbra arboris illius, quam desideraveram, sedi, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo (*Cantic. II, 3*).

(The sick man sits on the green turf, and, when the merciless heat of the dog days bakes the fields and dries up the streams, he in his sanctuary, shaded from the day's heat, filters the heavenly fire through a screen of leaves, his discomfort further eased by the drifting scent of the grasses. While he feeds his gaze on the pleasing green of grass and trees, fruits, to further his delight, hang swelling before his eyes, so that he can not inaptly say 'I sat in the shadow of his tree, which I had desired, and its fruit was sweet to my taste'.)<sup>87</sup>

Quoting the *Song of Songs*, the creator of the *Descriptio* has evoked all of the classic elements of the paradisaal garden. The monastic landscape, fed by the nurturing Aube, creates a redeemed space shaped from the imagining of its inhabitants. The curative properties of monastic life appear again in William of Saint-Thierry's account, in which William claims that '[at Clairvaux] the insane recover their reason, and although their outward man is worn away, inwardly they are born again'.<sup>88</sup> Once formed, the space exerts its imbued agency on new visitors, including, it seems, the *Descriptio's* author. The river, together with the greenery it nourishes, creates a cool, pleasant space in which the harshness of the sun and of life is lessened, the soul healed. The greenery forms part of the hydrology, for just as Aelred's spiritual garden was watered by virtue, so too was this space nourished by the Aube.

The above passage provides the clearest example of a phenomenon that is inherent within the merged structure of thought and water, the correlation of aesthetic pleasure with enlightenment. When a landscape is visually experienced and enjoyed, it soaks into the mind in the exact same manner in which revelatory knowledge permeates and enriches the soul: through affect. Through the enjoyment of the burbling river and the pleasant landscape along its banks, the sick man is nourished both physically and spiritually. This can be seen to denote more than the most obvious interpretation, namely that bodily rest and relaxation leads to spiritual wellbeing. We can instead extend the notion, through allegory, to understand that the pleasure and healing of landscape enjoyment are phenomenal representations of the internal pleasure and healing of spiritual nourishment by an invisible source.

The river meanders placidly through the meadows of the monastery, nourishing them. This nutritive force then leads to a blessed bounty, 'when, with the com-

<sup>87</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 569B–C; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, pp. 287–88.

<sup>88</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Ogg, p. 258.

ing of the mild spring weather, the pregnant earth [*terra praegnans*] gives birth'.<sup>89</sup> The river nurtures this new life, acting to 'keep it watered [...] lest the springing grasses should wither for lack of moisture'.<sup>90</sup> The spiritual and agricultural lives of the monastery exist in harmony within this description, for the bounty afforded to the monastery by the Aube echoes the spiritual bounty associated with Christian salvation. The transfer of energy from divine to human through the cycle of nature passes from point to point within a complex hydrology, its medium the ever-moving water. Its vivifying effect, allegorically understood, is the infusion of Cistercian life with salvific power.

The effect of this blessed water-fed fecundity is evident within the meadows, described as 'a spot that has much to delight the eye, to revive the weak spirit, to soothe the aching heart and to arouse to devotion all who seek the Lord'.<sup>91</sup> The landscape is possessed of a heavenly sweetness (*supernae dulcedinis*), and 'the smiling face of the earth with its many hues feasts the eyes and breathes sweet scents into the nostrils'.<sup>92</sup> The beauty of the meadows, 'while agreeably employed in the open', contains an equally pleasant 'mystery beneath the surface', the meaning behind the majesty of nature.<sup>93</sup> The beauty of the landscape, 'refreshed by the floodwaters of the Aube', comes from its *viriditas*, the greenness of nature. It emerges as a narrative effect of the constant motion of water throughout the landscape, overlaid with the constant movement of divine energies.<sup>94</sup> Just as the grass can stand the summer heat 'thanks to the moisture at its roots', so too is the community sustained by its

<sup>89</sup> '[...] cum verna temperie terra praegnans in partum solvitur, renascentia gramina humoris inopia marcescant'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 571C; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 289.

<sup>90</sup> '[...] renascentia gramina humoris inopia marcescant [...]'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 571D; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, pp. 289–90.

<sup>91</sup> 'Multum habet locus ille amoenitatis, multum quod mentes fessas allevet, luctusque solvat anxios, multum quod quaerentes Dominum ad devotionem accendat'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 572A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 290.

<sup>92</sup> '[...] dum ridens terrae facies multiplici colore, vernanti pictura oculos pascit, et suaveolentem naribus spirat odorem'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 571D–572A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 290.

<sup>93</sup> '...dum foris fruor ministerio, non parum latenti delector mysterio'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 572A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, p. 290.

<sup>94</sup> The passage implies that only the literate may read 'beneath the surface' of the *Descriptio*. This ties very closely to Hugh of Saint-Victor's discussion of literacy in *De tribus diebus*, in which Hugh claims that only the illiterate remark upon the colour and form of nature rather than seeking the mystery beneath. See Zinn, 'Minding Matter', p. 61.

fecund spirituality.<sup>95</sup> Water connects the landscape to the greater life cycle of Clairvaux and its environs, and spiritual rectitude from the divine source nourishes the souls of the brothers within.

The millpond captures the interest of the author, located ‘in the part of the meadow nearest the wall’. He appears particularly entranced by its creation out of nothing, a powerful act of monastic hydrological endeavour. ‘Where in former times the sweating labourer moved the hay with a sharp scythe’, marvels the writer, ‘today the brother in charge of the fish-ponds, seated on a wooden horse, is borne over the smooth surface of the liquid field’.<sup>96</sup> Within this passage, we see something of the special regard for hydraulics within monastic landscape-consciousness: a miracle of aqueous bounty has transformed the field into water. Once again, the miraculous nature of mechanical interventions in labour make an appearance. The ability of the fisherman in his boat to effortlessly replicate the labour of those working in the fields is morally valorized, just as the ability of the mill wheel to provide mechanical power is rendered as a form of non-human subservience to the divine mission of the Cistercian Order. The crucial role of aquaculture — the millponds and fisheries that were so crucial to medieval society — as a managed landscape is part of the miracle of Clairvaux, and the *Descriptio* describes the technology required to keep the millpond filled with water and stocked with fish as being of equal importance to its moral valences.

Not only has the Aube been flattened and turned to utility, but it also forms a microcosmic space of spiritual striving, a little collection of moral *figurae*, a hydrology within a hydrology. The fisherman engages in an act of moralized wrangling on the surface of the pond; nets ‘destined to entangle the fish’ are spread and ‘primed with a hidden hook to catch the unwary’.<sup>97</sup> The pond, through allegory, becomes a moral *exemplum* warning of the snares of Satan. This little *exemplum* amidst the river course demonstrates the power of small moral *topoi* embedded into a wider hydrology, with the river linking idea to idea. Bernard of Clairvaux was, after all,

<sup>95</sup> ‘Hoc ergo pratum intercurrentis fluvii fovetur irriguo, et ad humorem ejus mittit radices suas: ideo non timebit cum venerit aestus’. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 572A; ‘A Description of Clairvaux’, trans. by Matarasso, p. 290.

<sup>96</sup> ‘... ibi frater aquarius sedens mobili per lubricam liquentis campi planitiem equo vectus ligneo’. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 572C; ‘A Description of Clairvaux’, trans. by Matarasso, p. 291.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Explicatur rete sub undis quo implicetur pisciculus, et parantur ei escae quibus libenter vescitur, sed latet hamus in illis quo capitur incautus’. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 572C; ‘A Description of Clairvaux’, trans. by Matarasso, p. 291.

described by William of Saint-Thierry as 'God's fisherman'.<sup>98</sup> Like those drawing knowledge from the rivers of Godfrey's *Fons philosophiae*, the fisherman brings bounty from the depths. The language used to describe each act is curiously similar, revealing their typological likeness in the eye of the monastic beholder.

The author is equally fascinated by the spring of Clairvaux, contrasting its state as it 'glides to and fro unheard down subterranean channel' and as it bursts forth from the ground within the monastery. 'Like all good springs', we are told, 'it sallies out over against the rising sun, so that midsummer finds it greeting the roseate splendour of dawn full in the face'.<sup>99</sup> It appears to be no coincidence — given the level of moralized allegory in this text — that the bounty of the spring rises from the earth to greet the rising sun. For within Christian symbolism, the eastern sun represents Christ: the Orient, the Sun of Justice, and the new dawn of humanity.<sup>100</sup> The moral connotations of the spring merge with an engineering marvel that was 'not yet common enough to be taken for granted' in the High Middle Ages, as Roberta Magnusson puts it.<sup>101</sup> Twelfth-century Europe had seen the construction of many complex hydraulic systems — especially in monastic contexts — and yet the creation of new water sources was still a source of novelty and wonder. In her work on the abbey of Stavelot-Malmedy, for example, Ellen Arnold recounts a telling episode. In the miraculous tale, a blind woman was brought to the carefully ordered network of monastic canals. 'Look,' said her companions, 'water is flowing through the canals'. Her face was washed three times in the blessed water and 'light filled her eyes'. Arnold posits that this episode emphasizes the monk's role in constructing the healing canals, asserting dominance over both the water and the miraculous landscape.<sup>102</sup>

Partially a 'rebirth' of the Roman technological tradition of gravity-flow water systems and partially a spiritual 'rebirth' within the landscape, the author of the

<sup>98</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Costello, I.62, p. 66.

<sup>99</sup> 'Hic ergo fons (quod boni fontis esse fertur indicium) ex opposito solis orientis oritur, ita ut aestivo solstitio roseam rutilantis aurorae faciem ex adverso salutet'. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 574A; 'A Description of Clairvaux', trans. by Matarasso, pp. 291–92.

<sup>100</sup> In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore of Seville defines Christ as the Orient (*Oriens*) 'because he is the source of light and the brightener of things, and because he makes us rise (*oriri*) to eternal life'. Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. by Barney and others, VII.ii.27, p. 156.

<sup>101</sup> Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages*, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Arnold, 'Engineering Miracles', p. 494.



*Descriptio* finds the waterworks of Clairvaux wondrous on multiple levels. The language of technological amenity and spiritual admiration intermingle:

Ubi eum mons evomit, vallis deglutit: et in loco quo oritur, eodem quasi moritur, quin et sepelitur. Sed ne exspectes signum Jonae prophetae, ut tribus diebus et tribus noctibus delitescat absconditus: statim ad mille passus intra claustrum monasterii, quasi de corde terrae resuscitatus progreditur, et quodammodo redivivus apparet, visui tantum et usui fratrum se offerens, ne cum aliis quam cum sanctis sors illius amodo sit futura.

([The spring] wells out of the hillside only to be swallowed by the valley, and in the very place of its birth it seems to die, nay, even to be buried. But do not look for the sign of Jonah the prophet, expecting it to lie hidden away for three days and three nights: at once a thousand feet away, it rises again in the abbey cloister, as it might be from the bowels of the earth, and, as it were restored to life, offers itself to the sight and use of the brethren, lest its future lot should be with any but the holy.)<sup>103</sup>

Not content to remain hidden and in silence, the spring bursts forth from a protective tabernacle within a ‘small but pretty hut’, which ‘encloses it and protects it from any dirt’.<sup>104</sup> The revealed spring is contained and makes itself fit for the purposes of the monastic community. In a motif of dying and rising explicitly revealed by the author, the spring sacrifices itself so that the monastery may re-imagine the lost paradise. The application of technological principles to make the waters of the spring above Clairvaux and the Aube useful and to channel their power was equally worthy of admiration.

Through allegory, the spring becomes Christ the Saviour, sacrificing itself so that the monastery might live. The temporal power of technology and the spiritual power of Christ merge. Extending into the realms of moral doctrine and anagogy, the spring becomes the very fountainhead of the monastic life, the representation within the landscape that the abbey is a God-gifted community. In his treatise *On Conscience*, Peter of Celle explicitly compared the outflowing waters within the cloister with those of eternal life gifted by Christ for the purification of souls: ‘to your eyes that they may flow with tears, and to your ears that they may hear the voice of God’s praise, and to your hands that that they be clean

<sup>103</sup> *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 574A–B; ‘A Description of Clairvaux’, trans. by Matarasso, p. 292.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Tugurio, vel, ut majori reverentia dicam, tabernaculo parvo et pulchro cooperitur et clauditur, ne undecunque sordes admittat’. *Descriptio*, ed. by Migne, PL 574A; ‘A Description of Clairvaux’, trans. by Matarasso, p. 292.

of the blood of cruelty and lust, to your feet that the dust of earthly desires may be shaken off.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, flowing down from the heights to what is lower, this stream goes around the workshops of our cloister. It decorates the chapel with pools — both for washing the animals offered up for sin and for cleansing the very sanctuary of our soul — in such a way that it has a channel next to the altar at the priest's foot.<sup>106</sup>

At the very end of the journey, the spring appears at the very secret heart of the monastery, within the cloister itself, cleansing the hidden paradise of the monastic life. The *Descriptio*, by providing an origin for its most sacred waters, linked the monastery to a wider hydrology as imagined by monastic thought. The underground rivers of the world, through a deep and meandering path, were thought to originate in that first of fonts, the source of the rivers of paradise. In this fashion, a little piece of paradise, through the universal history of water, was present within the abbey physically, as well as spiritually and figuratively. Like the ability of water to carry Christ's salvific power through the sacrament of baptism, the ability of a cloister spring to replicate something of Eden's bounty in the temporal world was a victory of Cistercian self-imagination and the allegorization of the landscape.

The landscape in which the daily lives of medieval Europe's monks took place was read as an illustrative example; it was a landscape intimately tied to the beliefs of its observers, who had both the knowledge and the motivation to transform it to fit their purposes. The monastic topocosm was not a static installation on a passive site, but a stage on which the spiritual narrative of monasticism played out, constantly unfolding from its humble origins to a fully developed and harmonious imaginative construct. Although intractably enmeshed in the medieval salvation narrative, the landscape told its own distinct story. Its symbolism made use of the moral and material valence of water to introduce a principle of nutritive spirituality into the 'idea' of an abbey and its grounds. To refer back to the notion of the 'ecosystemosphere', we can gain much from the notion of a 'sphere' of interaction. The monastery, like a scientific ecology, was linked to a wider network of interactions. The *Descriptio*, however, sets this space in sharp distinction to the outside world, making it in some senses self-contained, in other senses part of a larger cosmic ecology. This ecology, part of the larger divine economy, must be simultaneously divorced from the post-lapsarian world, but fully incorporated into the City of God, which has a cosmic and eternal reach.

<sup>105</sup> Peter of Celle, 'On Conscience', trans. by Feiss, LXXXIX, p. 184.

<sup>106</sup> Peter of Celle, 'On Conscience', trans. by Feiss, XC, p. 184.

What can be learned from studying this landscape that may illustrate something of the medieval imagination as a whole? In this chapter, I have proposed that the answer to this question lies within a series of tropes by means of which water narrates the monastery. In a layer of meaning beyond (but not excluding) the day-to-day function of the monastery, the water within its grounds told a spiritual story.<sup>107</sup> In the *Descriptio*, we apprehend this process spreading far enough and enduring long enough for the reality to alter the ideal, creating a reciprocal symbolic dialogue between subject and object, between *macrocosmos* and *microcosmos*.

Furthermore, the narrative sequence of the text forms a hydrological path for the speculation of the reader, unfolding as a series of *figurae* that traces the manifold coursings of the Aube and the wider waterscape in which it participates. The *Descriptio* traces a sequence of incrementally revealed and edificatory images embedded in the path of the river. Just as the millers grind, the brewers pump, and the tanners dispose of their waste, so too does the entire monastic waterscape take up something of the river as its very life-blood and deposit something of itself back into its waters. Together, monastery and river form a harmonious industry like that of the original Creation reformed, and it is the purpose of the narrative *speculum* to reflect the justness and rectitude of this process.

From the fountain at the secret heart of the cloister to the well-irrigated meadows of the monastic estate, water was everywhere in the Cistercian world. It was the interpretation of this water as an interconnected representation not only of nature in action, but also of the moral topography that fed the narrative of the *Descriptio*. From a reading of the text, itself a narrative of another (nature) text, the structural conceits of water as a wholly intellectual construct emerge, revealing much of Cistercian practices of thought. As Mette Bruun has demonstrated, Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux dealt in complex spiritual topographies inspired by events from Scripture, history, and experience: within these topographies lies a self-sustaining hydrological imagining that tellingly reveals an image of monastic thought patterns for the modern reader. It is all the more telling for the fact that the text was written to make visible the invisible and abstracted life of the Cistercian spirit at Clairvaux.

Thus, the *Descriptio* is a double and simultaneous hydrological narrative. In the first of these sequences, the monastic landscape is reworked in the image of paradise, its appearance, use, and behaviour cast in the superlatives of prelapsar-

<sup>107</sup> Keith Lilley has introduced the notion of a recursive symbol, infinitely propagated from ideal to reality and from reality to reality via imitation or emulation. Lilley, 'Cities of God?', p. 308.

ian life. Cistercian life is imagined as a persistently symbolic experience, the landscape always signifying something hidden and powerful, an ecological signification of a greater transactional system of forces and energies. In the second narrative sequence, the hydrological mode of the *Descriptio* textually reworks the experiential landscape, providing a true mirror of its qualities. The river is a helpful servant, the garden soothes the soul, water is sweet, and the running of the river is a melodious and euphonic experience. Here, as in paradise, there is no toil unless for symbolic purposes; the earth gives freely. Here, as in paradise, the springing forth of waters imbues the world with vital energy.

### *Conclusion: Spirituality Without, Clairvaux Within*

At the conclusion of the narrative description of Clairvaux, something remains that is no longer landscape, no longer exegesis, no longer spirituality. Through evocation and description, the *Descriptio* has adumbrated a moving, flowing, densely interconnected network of monastic meaning joined by the bonding medium of water, an intellectual entity expressed through quotidian experience. Linking sky to soil to human to divine, the mediating connections of hydrological imagery provide a cohesive structural narrative for Cistercian life expressed explicitly and implicitly. The textual object of Clairvaux-as-hydrology both precedes the *Descriptio* in Cistercian landscape-consciousness and succeeds the text as a powerful logic of interconnectivity at the heart of what it is to be a Cistercian within the landscape. The abstraction is mapped upon the landscape by the text, but the landscape reciprocates, branding the logic of the spiritualized Aube onto the consciousness of the reader.

The deeply allegorical, seemingly perfect, balanced world depicted by the *Descriptio* was of course a construct of rhetoric, an abstraction created to represent the Order in the manner it chose to see itself. To my mind, it is unlikely that the text was written for non-Cistercians. Although the author is anonymous, it is logical by the language of the text to conclude that they were a Cistercian writing for other Cistercians. This makes the text a particularly exciting candidate for a hydrological reading, for it is a practical product of Cistercian self-imagination and abstract perception. It gives us a more nuanced understanding of the mechanism by which landscape and text become more than their content, exhibiting a powerful representation of the manner in which principles, things, and spaces were thought to relate to each other and act upon each other as a system. Just as the Clairvaux presented in the *Descriptio* is fixed in perfection as a network of *figurae*, so too is the water system it presents fixed as a densely interrelated ecology of nutrition feeding the meaning of the text.

On one level, the monastery is a landscape in which symbols are cultivated, replicated, and proliferated on a daily basis through agriculture, building, and ritual. In a very real sense, the monks composed a landscape by laying their beliefs upon it and physically re-working space, only for the space to re-work them in equal measure. They read their environment as a text, and the ideas contained therein shaped and moulded their thoughts, permeated their world-view, and influenced their actions. The result was a connected network of intellectual entities seamlessly overlaid upon an act of monastic industry, an endless cycle of reciprocal narrative. When Cistercians produced a literary text describing their landscape text, the image was distilled into an even more stylized abstract model. I see the four matrices of landscape perception described by Fitter and the recursive symbolism of Lilley as complementary companions: the former explains the many layers of imagination at play within any perception of landscape; the latter explains the investment of these matrices into a landscape, and the reciprocal investment of meaning back into the mind of the beholder.

By dividing the landscape perception and alteration drives within monastic thought into several streams of theory and analysis, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that landscape-consciousness within the monastery was profoundly tied to water. The garden and city *topoi* — with their respective images of divine essence in aqueous form — merge within the monastery to create a composite, with elements of Eden lost and Jerusalem yet to come. The spiritual drive behind this imagining of monastic purpose was given form by the symbolism of Christ and his attendant typologies. A perfected form of all salvific engineering, the Saviour was reflected in the bounteous flow of water from hidden springs and its fruitful proliferation in every corner of the abbey grounds.

As the landscape of the monastery was shaped and altered by the power of Christ's teachings and example, so too were the springs and rivers altered by the enactment of the monastic life. Monasteries were socio-natural sites, governed by both the arrangements of technologies and the complexes of beliefs and practices that made them possible. Medieval environmental history, especially that of a monastery, reveals behaviour that justifies economic activity and the exercise of power as spiritual, but equally explains the management of the landscape in spiritual terms — the *Descriptio* narrates the duality of this process. The aqueous narration of monasticism through the symbolism of landscape reveals the linkages between thought and environment, and that there is no true dichotomy between them. Furthermore, we may perceive a cyclical and reciprocal relationship, in which human ideas shape the imagination and symbolic formation of the landscape, and yet the landscape influences the observer and inhabitant in equal measure. As a locus of fecundity — both spiritual and natural — the symbolic life imagined by the monks

of medieval Christendom was replete with water, and yet this water was symbolically located so that the contrast between it and its surroundings was emphasized. Its narratives were patterns of energy passing through a system, the flows and scapes of Urry's terminology at work in environmental and cultural terms.

The hydrological model put forth by the *Descriptio* and other narratives of Cistercian purpose and belief forms many hydrologies, each layered like the senses of Scripture. On one level, it evokes an experiential space through which a very real river flows. On another, it forms an overlay of sacred flows and transfers and the material. On another, it is a landscape within the soul within which spiritual flows match the external environment. On a final level, it is a discrete, self-contained, autopoietic textual object that resides at the heart of its text, cannot be reduced to constituent parts, and endures as an amalgam of organizational principles from every corner of the monastic thought-world. Holding this overlaid inner and outer waterscape in mind gives us moderns, if only imperfectly, a glimpse of the forces structuring monastic thought, its principles of interrelation, and its mechanisms of abstraction.



Figure 8. 'British Library Manuscript Harley 2660, Humours and Elements (Isidore, *De Natura Rerum*)', London, British Library, MS Harley 2660, fol. 37<sup>r</sup>. 1136. Public Domain, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.



## CONCLUSION

Waters flow to open places, secret places, distant places, and surprising places. They infuse the world with life, bridging the gap between hidden source and arid destination, carrying life in their wake. Their structure, although often enigmatic and convoluted, is the pattern by which life emerges, the shape of causation. The myriad wonders of the living earth and all that is in it can all be attributed to one principle: the ability of rivers to flow, rain to fall, heat to evaporate, the atmosphere to churn and roil across the surface of the planet. Any living thing that is spatially distinct from any other living thing moves with the vigour invested in it by water. Life is fluvial, with the pulsing veins of Earth and the arid and dusty tracks of Mars drawing the snaking line between green, blue, and white, and a dull and baleful red. The deployment of these qualities for the purposes of organized thought is a fruitful topic for research because, through thought, we see a sense of arrangement that is both endlessly variable across time and culture, and yet a common experience of humanity, a grand pattern in the self-narrative of intellection and imagination.

Within a medieval context, patterns of fluviality reveal both Strang's 'common senses' of humanity — linking medieval minds to modern — and also the complex ways in which understandings of water are generated by a distinct intellectual culture: its spirituality, its challenges, its limitations, its affordances, and its epistemic underpinnings. For twelfth-century medieval monasticism, water in medieval intellectual culture was present within every area requiring pattern, form, energy, and motion, and yet it followed patterns carved by the structural conceits of medieval intellectual culture. Shaping the paths of these waters was an exercise in influence and a form of self-fashioning, a parallel to the acts of devotion and engineering that took place outside the mind. Medieval intellectual culture was shaped by its affordances and limitations, part of a broader rhetorical palate of medieval material imagery drawn from phenomenal and material experience. Grand patterns were

abstracted and applied on a dizzying variety of scales, giving form to discussions of energy transfers and patterns of interrelationship within the process of thinking that were essential to the functioning of learned discourse. They were creations of Scripture and the long history of pre-Christian and Christian thought, but were equally expressions of far more individual and far more fleeting acts of intellectual endeavour. Environment, conversely, bore the shape of these endeavours in narration and in action.

There are three principal points that I wish the reader to take away from this book, above all others. The first relates to medieval thought, the second to water, and the third to the intermingling of the two. Each point shares a quality in common: a reminder that patterns, be they environmental or intellectual, are part of the deep-time history of human sense-making and the specificities of history in equal measure. Both medieval monastic thought and its shaping of water into an intellectual entity are processes of knowledge visualization drawn from powerful cultural resonances peculiar to the intellectual world studied by this book, and processes that demonstrate the supreme power of environment to shape, influence, and determine human thought. If the reader is reminded of anything by this book, then perhaps it will be the paramount significance of pattern and its formative repetition. This repetition occurs not through superficial formal similarity, but through a similarity of essence, the replication of a template which created typologies of pattern. Form is pattern, and pattern is a philosophical matter.

The first point, pertaining to medieval thought, has relevance to those seeking to make sense of our environmental relationships in the present. Guiding metaphors gather together so many connotations that they become not content, but form. As we have seen in the case studies — the *Fons philosophiae*, the letters of Peter of Celle, and the *Descriptio* — they are the space within which thought takes place and determine the setting, the possible moves, the actors, and the relationships. They bundle experiences, received facts, and newly-minted novelties into an entity so formative that it patterns human cognitive structures. For medieval — and particularly high medieval — thought, the Judeo-Christian imagining of the hydrological cycle was so inextricably condensed with the imagining of human life that no water metaphor was simply a trope, a piece of content. This is important, for one could just as easily point to other fundamentals of medieval life and establish their role as a foundational metaphor. As we have seen with the shaping both of real landscapes and of the discourses about them (especially in the case of Chapter 5) intellectual entities, when combined, stimulated action. We must think ecologically when attempting to understand the formative frameworks of this action, but we must think ecologically in a medieval fashion.

The second point, pertaining to water in particular, returns to the notion introduced in Chapter 1 regarding the careful balance between historical specificity and universalism to which those studying water are beholden. Water is social, water is ontological, and water is spiritual. Because their fluidity is coupled with distinct structural features, oceanic and riverine systems easily form metaphors and frameworks for the multiple, changing connections and interactions between human beings. But the manner in which these things are thought to connect is entirely historical. For medieval water, ecology worked differently. It was not all-to-all, the Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome, but one to all, the uncreated spring, the manifold divisions, the ontological categories of life built upon and of these flows. Despite these patterns not flowing from all nodes to all nodes, there was a certain messiness, an *ad hoc* quality, to them. They were the product of a cosmos created by and presided over by an all-generative God, and the foundational metaphors derived from this perceived reality are part of a self-contained episteme that existed on its own terms, and survives today as an artefact of intellectual history within the diverse textual traces that evoke it. The water discussed in this book is like all other metaphorical entities in that it shapes human life at a pre-hermeneutic level. It is unlike all other such entities in that it does so in a manner that is so distinct as to be unthinkable with modern sensibilities. With water, however, we are gifted with a metaphorical commonality that allows us insight into the unthinkable specificities of medieval sense-making and thought structure.

The third point pertains to the interrelationship between technology and abstraction, lived experience and spiritual life. The three case studies within this book reveal that spiritual understandings of water in medieval intellectual culture can privilege divine reality over temporal knowledge or events, but that the language of water metaphor is also a language of practicalities. We cannot understand elite intellectual culture without an understanding of the technologies that gave its imagining of water shape and relevance, nor can we understand monastic behaviour or the wider intellectual cultures of the twelfth-century without these guiding metaphysical, Scriptural, and epistemic patterns. The realm of abstraction and that of daily life were never separated, just as medieval ideas of man and nature were not separate. It has always been correct to identify entanglements between medieval environmental actions and medieval thought — this is another piece of that puzzle.

The vital manifestations of complex water metaphor are diverse in form and function, but each shares the power of ecumenical mediation and facilitation. Each case study chapter reveals a unique context that feeds back into a more general understanding. Despite the distinctiveness of each chapter, all have something fundamental in common. Each case study addresses a problem of expression in

need of a solution, a fluid mental model for the execution of monastic thought. They must not only impart a message that is complex enough to frame thought through a memorable image of its structure, but also do so in a manner that is lively enough and provides sufficient evidence to impress the vitality of thought upon the recipient.

The *Fons philosophiae* of Chapter 3 is a natural expansion of such symbolic imagery, moving from a complex arrangement suggesting content to a hybrid poetic form that contains both form *and* content. Godfrey of Saint-Victor succeeds in teaching the content of the poem — derived from the tradition of liberal arts learning within his order exemplified by the *Didascalicon* — by presenting a structure through which to remember it. Once again, the discussion of the important *topoi* of Victorine learning requires prior knowledge: Godfrey's discussion of the *artes*, of Scripture, of intellectual giants such as Socrates or Aristotle would make no sense if one were not already thoroughly acquainted with them and their politics. The true gift to the readers of the poem is a revelation of the relationship between already assimilated ideas, the shaping of a sense of order, hierarchy, valence, and division to apply to the diverse goods waiting within the darkened storehouse of the memory.

The gift of water in the *Fons philosophiae* is the creation of a patterned space within the mind in which the thinker might wander through a catalogue for the vast collection of ideas necessary for compositional thought within the monastic intellectual world. The *Fons philosophiae* functions more as an introduction, or a versified résumé, of a knowledge corpus. It was not possible to recall all of the ideas needed for monastic life without an effective system of mental cataloguing. The affordances of water facilitate a transaction between knower and that which is to be known, just as a chair is both a function of the sitter knowing its identity and the design of the chair for sitting. Water is for connecting, for carrying purity, for washing away sin, for spreading across the surface of the Earth, and these affordances come to the forefront of their use by virtue of their aptitude for the patterns of ideas and of spiritual transfers within medieval thought.

In the case of Chapter 4, these patterns are even more implicit components of a shared network of ideas. Peter of Celle and his monastic correspondents know their material, but they are in search of creative arrangements of ideas to express this material in new and efficacious forms. The collections of letters sent back and forth between monastic sites in Europe were more than interpersonal communication; they were collections of spiritual elucidations, exegeses, and moral *exempla*. They were also 'literary memorials', as Haseldine put it, a method of memory storage and dynamic simulation of ideas in a space of community and shared intel-

lectual endeavour.<sup>1</sup> They required a framework that both structured their moral lessons and linked them to other sites within the landscape of learning inhabited by the letter writers. On a macrotextual level, the edited and curated entity that we call a 'letter collection' reveals a unified vision of moral life framed through a dazzling variety of rhetorical creations, but with a powerful theme of hydrological interaction. Peter's letters are also powerful in the sense that they are an exercise in rhetorical power, and water provides the same enablement of power that it does in the material world.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we see the merging of intermingled metaphorical spaces within the abstract realms of medieval thought with the daily experience of the environment. If one had the primary source evidence, one could speculate that reading the *Fons philosophiae* would have a distinct effect on the manner in which a twelfth-century monastic interacted with the world through their use of guiding metaphor. In the case of Peter of Celle, we have ample evidence that monastic letter writers considered letters to be an ideal source of instruction and spiritual guidance, not just for the recipient, but for a wider audience. In the case of the *Descriptio*, we have both sides of the process available to us for interpretation, a seemingly descriptive account of a monastery and its grounds, and overlaid abstract works mingled with daily experience. It is here that we see the truth of the matter: although complex metaphorical spaces exist apart from daily experience, they derive from and recursively return to daily life. For a monk, this daily life required a necessary balance between daily spiritual life and the quotidian observance of a regular monastic life.

Leading on from this point in relation to Chapter 5 and the wider argument, it is important to meditate on the manner in which these monastic fluid models of thought reveal a water management of the inner world, or even of the soul. If we shape our tools, and then our tools shape us, as Marshall McLuhan famously proposed, then 'we become what we behold'.<sup>2</sup> Jen Boyle and Martin Foys argue that as 'we strain and strive to express new ideas about old things', we should not only explore the media of medieval studies, but look for expressions of medieval thought 'becoming media'.<sup>3</sup> I contend that we can see a new form of monastic interactive medium emerging here — an anachronistic phrase to be sure, but a *productive* anachronism. If we view these rhetorical models as monastic immersive media

<sup>1</sup> Haseldine, 'The Creation of a Literary Memorial'.

<sup>2</sup> McLuhan, *Becoming Media*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Boyle and Foys, 'Editors' Introduction: Becoming Media', p. 3.

— entered into and connected with using the interface of Scriptural interpretation and the *ars rhetorica* — then monastic tools (Scripture, exegesis, natural imagination, agriculture, the liberal arts, animal husbandry, and so on) become internalized, and in turn go to work on the monastic mind. As Arnold has proposed, monastic thought and landscape were in a symbiotic and recursive relationship.<sup>4</sup> Could it be the case that the result is a hermeneutic circle in which monks apprehend nature and construct models from it, which in turn affect their management of the environment, which in turn lead to their management of themselves?

This book has also highlighted an area of promising future research beyond its own scope, but of increasing interest. There is much potential for further formal analysis of medieval thought through methodologies such as systems theory, diagrammatology, and information technology-driven discourses such as those surrounding knowledge visualization. Although these are currently heavily grounded in modern scientific and theoretical conceits, there is much to be said about these approaches through a medieval frame. By ‘a medieval frame’ I do not mean that these methodologies have not been applied to the Middle Ages, but that systems, diagrams, networks, and visualizations are all tied up in the context of their invention, and that there is a uniquely medieval context. This context is not simply a matter of different data and different priorities for the recording or display of this data, but a fundamentally different understanding of what data visualization itself is for, and what affordances it can grant to the learner and thinker.

Just as there is a ‘medieval water’, there are equally rich possibilities for studies of systematic thought grounded in the philosophies, knowledge practices, ethics, and metaphysics of medieval minds. Systematic notions such as semiology, ecology, landscape, space, and memory continue to be profitably interrogated in a medieval context. It is equally important to understand what a system, a network, or a diagram might mean in a medieval thought-world. There is promising research expanding our understanding of medieval graphicacy — the interpretation of information through graphic means — beyond its strongest current trends in memory, literacy, and landscape studies, but this book suggests that any such advance in research should reassess and reinterpret the *formal graphicacy*, the systematic visualization capabilities, of medieval thinkers.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there are forms of formal graphical interpretation that are abstract, seen within the mind’s eye rather than with the

<sup>4</sup> Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*.

<sup>5</sup> See the *Graphicacy and Authority in Early Europe* project funded from 2012–2017 at the University of Oslo. See also the discussion in Principle Investigator Ildar Garipzanov’s seminal article ‘The Rise of Graphicacy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages’.

outer eye. Twenty-first century information technology has led to unprecedented changes in our knowledge visualization practices (many of them abstract), making a clear and historicized understanding of premodern systematic visualization all the more important. Understanding the specifics of medieval thought graphically sheds new light on the novelty of our own times, and places formal practices of knowledge organization in a historical context. The risk of studying the formal dimensions of medieval thought must necessarily be a lack of time to focus on the important minutiae, but this is an inseparable limitation of any distant reading. The results are worth it, but not complete without other detailed studies.

Frances Yates, Patrick Geary, Mary Carruthers, and other influential researchers of medieval memory theory have expanded the repertoire of sources that can be considered from a systematic perspective, and yet there may be many more possible forms of evidence that can be considered. Moreover, there may also be different focuses to be found, different disciplines to incorporate. In the formation of each new approach, a creative selection of source and methodology led to a new insight, and this is a frontier of research that can be profitably expanded. In each case, an unexpected combination has been the key. The study of knowledge visualization joins a growing body of work on medieval maps and diagrams in revealing the fecundity of non-verbal sense-making within medieval practices of thought.<sup>6</sup>

This book reminds us that we must make our own way, compose our own foundational metaphors, and that we can study past thought-worlds as a source of inspiration. There can be no romantic and atavistic embrace of patterns past, for these patterns are intrinsically tied up in the beliefs and practices that gave them force. Nor can we claim that our approach is better, since comparative terms like 'better' or 'worse' mean nothing when attempting to understand ourselves on our own terms and the past on *its* own terms. Intellectual history can inspire us, but each intellectual culture must shape its own path, its own metaphorical patterns for memory and cognition. We may, however, learn a great deal from the conscious composition practices of past intellectual cultures and use the history of ideas as a fuel for the future. We must not see historical patterns as a foil to this process, but as a source of context, critique, and comparison. We are no more advanced today in our compositional practices than our premodern predecessors, despite our technologies, and yet we have different needs: we ask water different questions. The affordances of environment that we desire to utilize are predicated upon a unique thought-world of our own and within it diverse cultural, religious, and

<sup>6</sup> For a good example of cutting-edge thinking on the topic at the time of writing, see Steiner and Ransom ed., *Taxonomies of Knowledge*.



philosophical differences. Just as medieval monastic thought taxed medieval graph-icity through the need for extremely complex mnemonic frameworks of content, so too are we taxed by the vast vicissitudes of simulation, networking, and virtualization that the information age has necessitated.

Water confers power on those who harness it, and understanding the manner in which these power-wielders understood, shaped, manipulated, loved, feared, and interacted with their fluid medium teaches us the invisible pathways of influence within a society. If one wishes to understand who has power within a society, one can learn much by studying its waters. For twelfth-century Western monasticism, a uniquely privileged subset of medieval society, water offered many modes of power. It enhanced influence through the moral medium of storytelling — the saintly *vitae* and monastic establishment *gestae* that narrated its mission and growth. It conferred authority through the efficacy of rhetoric, teaching, preaching, philosophy, and theology, a toolkit for spiritual authority and moral influence in medieval Christendom. It gave power through the waters itself, with monastic hydraulic engineers diverting, shaping, and channelling water to provide labour, convenience, cleanliness, and refreshment. These modes of power intermingled: agricultural cultivation could be deployed as the imagery of literate discourse and spiritual learning, hydraulics as the control of moral destiny. Superlative imagery of the heavenly Jerusalem could bridge the gap between the divine and the human through hidden conduits. The study of the modes of thought through which these acts of power were exercised, the rhetoric of their execution, and the vocabulary of their eloquence reveal monastic engagement with nature bringing power, and intellectual power bringing influence over nature.

One thing is certain: water was an intellectual entity of complex power for medieval minds, and remains so today. It is an indispensable cultural vocabulary. This ends the book on an ethical point. We must protect and nurture our waters, for they are a reservoir of inspiration for the composition that allows us to think in an orderly and flexible fashion. A degraded environmental entity leads to a degraded intellectual entity, and poverty without leads to poverty within. This is an eminently sensible medieval ethos from which to draw inspiration, and one that will enrich our inner life if heeded. Within this frame, water becomes all the more potent. It is not only essential for human life and inextricably enmeshed in our societies, cultures, and religions, but also part of our most fundamental graphical pattern recognition. When we see a river, we see a pattern that is both simple enough to intuit superficially, and complex enough to study deeply. This pattern is not only a discrete entity, but a connector of entities. Pattern is what allows thought; connection is what drives it. For medieval thinkers, the painting of a picture within the mind drew together the elements of Creation to compose something to feed

new thought and drive action. For twelfth-century Western monasticism, water was a guiding force in the shaping of intellectual life; for medievalists it is a key to an episode in a long history of intellectual engagement with water, and a case study in abstract sense-making. For modern thinkers, neurochemistry, neurobiology, and psychology offer secrets to our compositional practices, but it is still patterns that we seek. In all cases, water provides the fluid conduits by which thought moves, divides, flows, *lives*. It is not neat and tidy, but messy and winding, always in flux. Its journey from source to destination, however, is inevitable.



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